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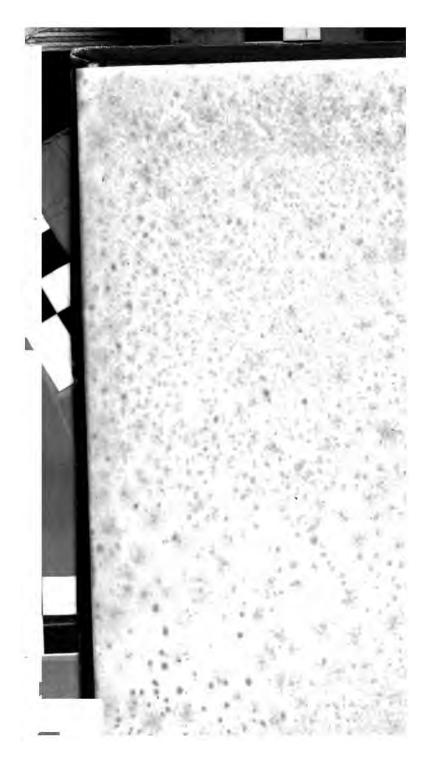
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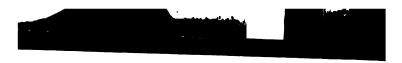
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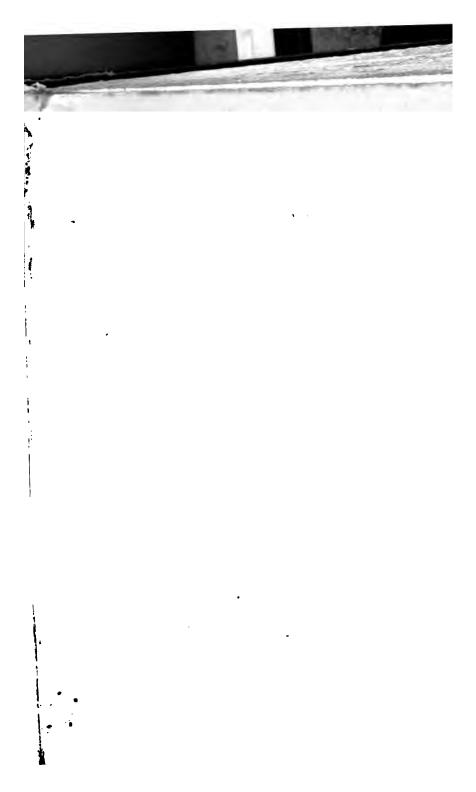


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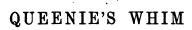
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# QUEENIE'S WHIM

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BY

### ROSA NOUCHETTE CAREY

AUTHOR OF 'NELLIE'S MEMORIES,' 'ONLY THE GOVERNESS,'
'NOT LIKE OTHER GIRLS,' 'ROBERT ORD'S ATONEMENT,' 'WOOED AND MARRIED,' ETC.

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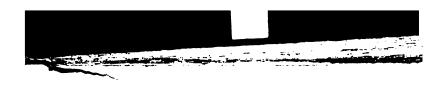




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# CHAPTER I

#### TREATS OF 'ARITHMETIC

'A little way, a very little way
(Life is so short), they dig into the rind,
And they are very sorry, so they say,—
Sorry for what they find.'—JEAN INGELOW.

ONE always thinks the history of the ugly duckling one of the truest and most pathetic of all stories. It commences in the sad minor key, a long prelude of oppression, of misunderstanding. The unknown creature, sombre of plumage, makes no way among its companions; its folded-up beauties remain hidden. The duck-pond represents the world. Amidst plenty of quackery and folly the weaker goes to the wall. By and by the key changes; the long neck arches above the weeds; amid a burst of triumph the ugly duckling sails away into fairy-land a beautiful swan.

After all there is a wonderful moral hidden under these quaint old stories. Beauty and goodness always go together; the ugly sister, dropping toads instead of diamonds and roses, is only the poetical incarnation of envy and discontent; truth and mercy and kindness to the aged always unfold themselves under the garb of a beautiful young girl. And so the children glean precious stones of wisdom, odd-shaped and many-coloured, out of the fanciful borders of fairy-land.

Queenie Marriott once compared herself and her little sister Emmie to the ugly duckling of the fable. 'There must be two of them,' she said; 'only it was dubious whether either of them would become swans.'

No one at Granite Lodge understood them; certainly not



# QUEENIE'S WHIM

Miss Titheridge, or the other teachers, or the girls, unless it were Cathy; and even Cathy, much as she loved them, thought them peculiar.

Queenie was only speaking metaphorically when she made this droll simile—the grave young teacher, Madam Dignity, as the other girls had nicknamed her, was sufficiently alive to her own attractions not to fear unjust comparisons.

Without being handsome, Queenie was woman enough to know that her clear brown complexion, white teeth, and brown velvety eyes would win a certain amount of commendation. Queenie's eyes, as she well knew, were her strong point—they were of singular depth and expression. Some one once remarked that they reminded him of brown wells, for they had no bottom. Somebody was right; but they were not mild eyes for all that.

But it must be told how Queenie Marriott became a teacher at Miss Titheridge's, in the select establishment for young ladies at Granite Lodge, where her little sister Emmie was a sort of foundation scholar, or demi-semi-boarder, as one witty young lady described her, with reference to the somewhat scanty scholastic privileges eked out by Miss Titheridge in return for unmitigated drudgery on Queenie's part, and a trifling stipend paid out of Queenie's poor little purse—the contents of which barely sufficed to find them in decent clothing.

Her own and part of Emmie's board were all the wages Queenie received for her endurance and patient labour; and half of the miserable little pittance of forty pounds a year, left to her by her mother, was paid quarterly into Miss Titheridge's hand, invariably received by Miss Titheridge in the same stony manner, and acknowledged in the same words:—'I hope you and Emily will always be grateful to us, Miss Marriott, for the handsome and gratuitous manner in which my poor sister and myself have befriended you' (the second Miss Titheridge had been dead fifteen years, but it was Miss Titheridge's way always to associate the deceased as though she were still the partner of her labours). 'There would have been very few in this mercenary world who would have acted as generously, but, as Caroline always beautifully puts it, we do it "not to be seen of men."'

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After which speech it was odd that the visitors to Granite Lodge, when they were ushered into the schoolroom, always gazed curiously at the young teacher, and then at a certain closely-cropped head in the darkest corner, and went out whispering to themselves of Miss Titheridge's Christianity and magnanimity of soul. In more than one case the story turned the scale in the mind of a dubious parent, who after such a recital could not but trust her darling under the care of so good a creature as Miss Titheridge.

'My dear, she actually supports those two poor orphans; she assured me that a few pounds are all she receives, and that is pressed upon her. Can you conceive such generosity?' went on one warm-hearted visitor, the mother of seven female hopes, at least to Miss Titheridge; 'a poor hard-working schoolmistress, and treats them as though they were her own

daughters.'

Queenie and Em and their staunch friend Cathy could have told a different tale, less varnished and highly coloured. Miss Titheridge's adopted daughters fared somewhat scantily; not indeed on the bread and water of affliction, but on bread on which the butter was spread sparingly, on cold tea, on the least tempting cuts of the joint after the young ladies were served. And they were lodged somewhat coldly, in a large roomy attic, with a draughty window and no fireplace, wherein little Em's hands became at times very blue and chilled—a place much haunted by a sportive family of mice, who gambolled and nibbled through the small hours of the night, with an occasional squeak from Mr. or Mrs. Mouse that roused Queenie, dozing uneasily under the thin blankets, and kept her awake and shivering for hours. These were hardships certainly, but, as Queenie was given to observe somewhat bitterly, she was used to hardships.

Queenie and her little half-sister Emily were the daughters of a clergyman who had held a living in the north of England, at first in Lancashire, which he had afterwards exchanged for one in Yorkshire.

Queenie never recollected her mother, but she did not long miss maternal care, which was warmly lavished upon her by her young stepmother.

Queenie was only seven years old when her father married



# QUEENIE'S WHIM

again; he had made an excellent choice in his second wife, and, as was extremely rare in such cases, had secured a real mother for his little girl.

Mrs. Marriott was not a judicious woman in some respects, but she was extremely warm-hearted and sensitive; she would have thought it the height of injustice to make any difference between the children, even though one was her own, and she prided herself on treating them with equal tenderness.

Mr. Marriott was devotedly attached to his wife and children, and yet it could not be said that he was a happy He had one fault—he was a bad arithmetician; throughout his life he never could be made to understand

that a pound did not consist of thirty shillings.

It sounds ludicrous, impossible !—a highly educated man, and a good Christian; nevertheless it was the case. mistaken notion spoiled his life, and brought him to his deathbed a broken-spirited man.

Queenie never recollected the time when her father was not in debt; the sweet domestic life of the Vicarage was poisoned and blighted by this upas-tree shadow of poverty. Mrs. Marriott's pretty-girl bloom died out under it, her soft cheek grew thin and haggard. It haunted the study chair where Mr. Marriott spent hours of hard brain and heart labour for his people; it spoke despondently in his sermons; it weakened the strong head and arm, and marred their usofulness.

The man was certainly faulty; he had begun life at the wrong end; he had been bred up in luxury, and had educated himself to the pitch of fastidiousness; he would preach the (lospel, and yet not endure hardness, neither would he lay aside the purple and fine linen that should be his by inheritance.

Fresh from the university, he had commenced life in this Long before prudence would have dreamed of such a thing, he had taken a wife to himself, a beautiful young creature, also a clergyman's daughter, who brought her husband a dowry of forty pounds a year.

After her death, which occurred when Queenie was two years old, there was a long sad interval of confusion and mismanagement. An extravagant master and extravagant

servants made sad havoc in an income that ought to have sufficed for comfort and competence.

The young widower was in sore plight when Emily Calcott married him, thereby angering and alienating her only remaining relative, a brother, at that time a wealthy solicitor in Carlisle.

'Heaven forbid that you should do this thing, Emily!' he had said to her, not unkindly, but with the hardness habitual to him. 'If you marry Frank Marriott you will live to rue the day you ever became his wife; thriftless, extravagant, and already in debt they tell me, and burthened with a child. Pause a moment before you decide, and remember that you must choose between him and me.'

Emily Calcott paused many moments before she consented to shake off the dust of her brother's house, and shut out from him the light of her fair face, the only one his crabbed and narrowed nature ever really loved. But Frank Marriott was a goodly enough man to look upon, and had dangerous gifts of persuasiveness; and pity in her soft heart was even stronger than love, and he seemed so helpless, left with his little child; and so she married him. She had walked, poor thing, open-eyed into a very pitfall of shifting perplexity. From the very first she found herself entangled in a web of everyday worry and annoyance; small debts grew larger and widened pitiably; and so the woman's honest soul grew faint and weak, and no purpose, however strong, and no effort, however well sustained, seemed to extricate them.

It was just that mistake of thirty shillings in the pound that caused the fatal mischief. Queenie, young as she was, soon grasped the truth of it all.

'We are poor because we have never learned to do without things,' she said once to her father, whom she loved tenderly, and yet, saddest of all things in a girl's life, whom she somehow failed to honour. She had gone to him like a zealous young reformer, to organise a new régime in that troubled household. Her stepmother was dead—prematurely faded and worn out—and things seemed tending to some painful crisis. 'It is not honest to do what we are doing; we must measure our needs by our purse. I am not ashamed of our poverty, or of my shabby dresses,' went on the girl, in

# QUEENIE'S WHIM

a hard, proud voice, with a little gasp in it. 'Mamma did not mind it, neither do I. But what shames me is to know that we have not paid people—that we never shall if we go on like this. Papa, papa, do rouse yourself, and look into things, and you will see what I mean.'

'Yes, yes, child, so I will,' he had answered, cowed by her carnestness and by some presentiment of the truth; but

the effort killed him.

He had not been a wilfully dishonest man, he had merely 'not learned to do without things,' as Queenie put it in her childish way. He was a gentleman, and such things had become the necessaries of life to him. The pound had not yielded him thirty shillings after all.

People said the Vicarage was unhealthy, not properly drained and ventilated, or a low fever would not have carried off both husband and wife. But might it not have been that, in the old Biblical phrase, the man's spirit had died within him, and left him an easy prey to the fever?

Queenie thought so as she sat beside him in those long night watches. 'What a fool I have been about money and everything!' she heard him mutter once. Oh, if he had only learned to do without things, how much happier for them all!

It was an unhealthy home atmosphere for a girl to breathe. Queenie grew up with two very prominent ideas: first, that money was essential to happiness, and secondly, that honesty and self-denial were two of the greatest virtues. Poverty is a hard taskmaster to the young. Queenie became a little hard and reticent in her self-reliance; she made bitter speeches occasionally, and had odd little spasms of repressed passion. But she had two weak points, Emmie and Cathy, and she would have worked herself to death for either of them.

Between her and Miss Titheridge there was war to the death. A few of the girls disliked her, two or three feared her, to the rest she was purely indifferent. She was their equal, but because of her shabbiness and poverty they chose to regard her as their inferior. Quiet disdain, unmitigated reserve, should be her rôle for the future.

Neither did she owe Miss Titheridge any gratitude. Miss Titheridge had a conscientious teacher cheap, that was all.

She had paid her own and Emmie's board over and over again by hours of ceaseless drudgery and painstaking work.

'She gives me stones instead of bread,' she said once to her only confidante. 'What do I owe her, Cathy! Has she ever a kind word or look for us! is she ever otherwise than hard on Emmie! It makes me miserable to see Emmie; she is pining like a bird in a cage. Sometimes I think I would rather live with Emmie in a garret, and take in plain needlework. We could talk to each other then, and I could tell her stories, and make her laugh; she never laughs now, Cathy.'

'Hush, Queenie; you are so impetuous. I have a plan in my head—a dear, delightful plan. We shall see, we shall see.'

## CHAPTER II

#### GRANITE LODGE

'O shun, my friend, avoid that dangerous coast,
Where peace expires and fair affection's lost;
By wit, by grief, by anger urged, forbear
The speech contemptuous and the scornful air.'
Dr. JOHN LANGHARNE.

How Queenie became the under teacher at Miss Titheridge's must be told here shortly.

Queenie was only seventeen when her father died, but she had already formed her own plans of independence. The repressive atmosphere of a companion's or governess's existence was peculiarly repugnant to her taste. Teaching was indeed her forte. She had plenty of patience and industry; her love of children was deep and inherent; but she felt that she must seek another channel, where she could work off superfluous energy and attain independence. She would be a national schoolmistress. Aided by a friend, one of the few left to her, Queenie so far carried out her determination that she spent the next two years at a training college at Durham, and had just obtained a second-class certificate when new difficulties intervened.

The old nurse with whom she had placed Emmie died; the little stock of money which had been collected for the orphans by sympathising friends was diminishing daily. Where could she find a home for Emmie? It was at this juncture that Miss Titheridge, who knew the Marriotts of old, and who was just then in sore need of an under governess, stepped in with a magnanimous offer. Miss Marriott would give her services in return for Emmie's board and education.

'Queenie had hours of secret fretting before she could make up her mind to relinquish her cherished independence. Miss Titheridge was personally odious to her. The decorous rules and monotony of the life would oppress and weigh upon her. Still beggars must not be choosers, as her old friend Caleb Runciman often said; and it was for Emmie's sake. Oh, if Miss Titheridge would only be kind to Emmie, how she would work for her, how she would show her gratitude!

Futile hope! Before many months were over, Queenie bitterly rued the false step she had taken, and grew sullen with a sense of repressed wrong. Little Emmie drooped and pined in the unloving and uncongenial atmosphere. The poor little sensitive plant grew mentally dwarfed; the young shoots ceased to expand. Queenie could have wrung her hands with anguish when she thought of her own weakness and impotence to avert the mischief. Emmie's bright intelligence grew blunted; a constant system of fault-finding and rigorous punishment cowed and stupefied the child's timid spirit; only kindness and judicious training could avail with such a nature.

Emmie did not grow sullen, her temper was too sweet and mild to harbour resentful feelings; but she became morbid and over-sensitive. Deprived of the recreation natural to children, her imagination became unhealthily developed; she peopled the old garret with fancies, and not unfrequently raised a Frankenstein of her own creation.

Queenie sometimes found her cowering in the window recess in the twilight in a perfect stupor of terror, for which she could give no tangible reason. It was dark, and she was afraid, and she did not like to come down into the school-room, as she was in disgrace with Fraulein, and so on. Poor pitiful fragments out of a child's life, small everyday tyrannies, little seeds of unkindness dropped into virgin soil, to bring forth perhaps a terrible harvest.

Queenie's passionate love could not shield the little sister; the two could only cling to each other in mute sorrow, each trying to hide from the other how much they suffered.

'I am only tolerably miserable,' Emmie would say sometimes, in her droll, unchildish way. 'Don't cry, Queenie; you and I and dear old Caleb will live together some day, I know.

when I am a woman perhaps, and then we shall forget all our troubles,' and Emmie would hide the little blackened hand on which Fraulein's ruler had come down so sharply that day, and say nothing of the pain, for fear Queenie should fret. But with all her childish troubles, Emmie suffered less than the elder sister. Queenie would lie awake with aching head and throbbing pulses night after night, revolving schemes for delivering them both from the house of bondage, as she phrased it.

And every night Emmie prayed her poor little prayer that she might not hate Miss Titheridge, and that she and Queenie and Caleb might live together in a little house all by themselves.

Emmie was never weary of describing this ideal house. It must have four rooms and a cupboard, and a little garden in front, where they might grow sweet peas and roses.

'I should hate to be rich; should not you, Queenie?' she would say sometimes. 'Caleb would not be able to smoke

his long pipes then.'

Caleb Runciman was the only friend they knew outside the gates of Granite Lodge, for Queenie had long ago broken with the old acquaintances whom she had known when her father was alive. Some had been offended at her independence and unwillingness to take their advice, others had merely cooled, a few had forgotten the orphans. Queenie was too proud to remind them of her existence; but she and Emmie clung to their old friend Caleb Runciman. He was the old confidential clerk of their uncle, Andrew Calcott, who was still the principal solicitor in Carlisle.

Andrew Calcott had never forgiven his sister her marriage with Frank Marriott. She had chosen between them, he said, and must abide by, her decision. The hard, jealous nature had received a secret blow from which it never recovered. In a moment of bitter passion he had uttered a terrible oath, which only poor Emily Calcott and Caleb Runciman heard, that neither she nor any child of hers should ever have a penny of his money.

'It is your money, Andrew, not mine,' Emily had answered very sadly and meekly, for after her unfortunate marriage much of her old spirit had died out; 'but you should not be so hard on me, my dear,' and as she spoke Andrew Calcott's cheek had turned very pale.

'Depend upon it, my dear young lady, he repented of his speech the moment it had passed his lips,' Caleb had said more than once to Queenie as he narrated this circumstance, which he was fond of doing with a great deal of dramatic energy. 'Aye, that was a terrible oath he took, and enough to blacken any man's soul; no wonder he grows harder every year; and his temper is enough to try a saint, let alone a poor sinner like me, till we daren't answer him for fear of flying in a passion.'

Mr. Calcott lived in a large handsome house in Harlsden Road. Queenie and Emmie often met him when they walked out in double file to take the air, as Miss Titheridge termed the daily exercise, and Emmie always shrank nearer to her sister at the sight of the tall, austere-looking man, who sometimes eyed them so sternly.

Mr. Calcott knew that the little girl in the shabby garment, who always walked last in the procession, holding so tightly to her companion's hand, was his dead sister's only child; he knew as well that the older girl was Frank Marriott's daughter, but he never acknowledged the relationship save by a deeper frown.

Poor old Caleb Runciman could only befriend them in secret. On their rare holidays the sisters would slip through the streets in the twilight, and steal into the small, two-storied house, with its dark entry and small wainscoted parlour looking out on the winding street.

How they loved that parlour—Emmie especially, with its slippery horsehair sofa and wooden rocking-chair. The very blue china tiles that lined the fireplace, and the red and drab table-cloth on the little round table, were objects of beauty in her opinion. Caleb, with his watery blue eyes, and cheeks like withered apples, and stubbly grey hair, was the handsomest man she had ever seen. She liked his brown, snuffy waistcoat and silver chain; his satin stock with its coral pin was simply gorgeous. Had not dear mamma when a little girl sat on his knee, and hugged him as Emmie did, when he slipped the new shilling into her hand on Christmas Eve? To pour tea out of the little black teapot and partake of hot

buttered cakes that his old servant Molly had made was Emmie's greatest treat. Her thin cheeks would grow quite pink with excitement, her large blue eyes, generally so dim, would widen and brighten.

'She looks almost pretty then, Cathy,' Queenie would say triumphantly to her friend; 'if only Miss Titheridge had not

cut off her curls.'

Cathy used to listen to this sisterly praise in silence. In her eyes Emmie was certainly a very plain child. She had an old, sickly-looking face, which the closely-cropped light hair did not set off to advantage; besides which, she was angular and ungainly, and her frocks were always too short for her.

Other coins besides the bright shilling found their way into the sisters' slender purses; a shy, hesitating hand would push the shining gold piece into Queenie's palm. 'It is for Emmie. Bless you, my dear, that poor lamb is deprived of thousands, absolutely thousands. There, take it; I have plenty, and to spare; it will get her some toy or other.' And Queenie, swallowing down the odd lump in her throat, would thank the old man, and go home rejoicing, thinking of the new hat or the warm winter stockings it would buy for Emmie.

Granite Lodge was a large grey house of imposing aspect, but hardly giving one the idea of a cheerful residence, the blank, desolate look being strongly suggestive of a jail or a workhouse. One of the girls, the wag of the school, had once chalked up over the door those famous words of Dante, 'All ye who enter here leave hope behind,' a jest dearly rued by the whole school, and expiated by many a bitter task, the innocent suffering with the guilty. Heavy iron gates clanged to and fro with metallic sound, infusing vague sentiments of alarm in the breasts of timid pupils. The windows were high and narrow; everywhere there were grey neutral tints; the young footsteps echoed drearily on the stone hall and staircase.

It was the weekly half-holiday. The large classrooms were empty and deserted, save for one occupant. Miss Titheridge's young ladies, escorted by the English and French governesses, had gone down the town to transact all sorts of mysterious business, chiefly in the confectionery and perfumery line. Two or three of them, and these comprised the aristocracy of

the school, were paying visits in the close. The chancellor's daughters, who gave themselves airs, and were consequently much petted by Miss Titheridge, had gone down to the cathedral, and were afterwards to drink tea at the Dean's, in company with a niece of one of the minor canons, thereby inspiring the remaining three and twenty young ladies with secret envy.

Miss Titheridge sat in her snug little parlour with the German governess, who was just then the reigning favourite; Miss Titheridge, like most autocrats, having always a favourite on hand, who was always arbitrarily deposed at the first symptom of independence.

The bright little French governess, Mademoiselle La Roche, had long ago fallen into disgrace, and the heavy-featured, stolid Fraulein Heimer had taken her place.

It was a damp, chilly day in October; a clinging mist pervaded the whole place; the leaves lay in rotting heaps on the garden paths; the black boughs of the almost leafless trees seemed to shiver and creak in their bareness.

Inside the prospect was scarcely more cheering. A small cindery fire burned drearily in the large classroom, scarcely driving out the damp, which seemed to settle everywhere,—on the dim window-panes, on the globes and bust of Pallas, making Queenie shiver as she bent over the piles of slates and exercises at one corner of the long table.

Across the hall she could hear now and then the pleasant spluttering of logs and clink of teaspoons. A faint perfume, redolent of tea and toast, was wafted across from the little room where Miss Titheridge and the German governess were sitting cosily in the twilight, with their feet on the fender, and a plate of buttered muffins between them. An hour hence a tempting repast of weak tea and thick bread and butter would be dispensed to Miss Titheridge's young ladies, to be enjoyed as only hungry schoolgirls can enjoy. But Miss Titheridge was never present on these occasions; her nerves required a certain amount of quiet, and meditation towards the close of the day was necessary to all thoughtful minds. It was a little odd that Miss Titheridge's meditations were always accompanied by a mysterious sound closely resembling somnolence.

As the dusk crept on, Queenie shivered and sighed un easily over her task; some harassing thought evidently impeded progress. By and by she pushed the books impatiently from her, and began pacing the room with quick, restless steps, now and then pausing to rest her hot forehead against the window-pane.

'Twice this week,' she muttered at last, half aloud. 'I must speak, whatever happens; and yet if I should do harm? I wish Cathy were here; but no, we trouble her enough. I must act on my own responsibility. I can do anything but stand by and see it. If I were only sure of keeping my

temper!'

Uttering these slightly incoherent sentences, the young governess moved slowly to the door, remaining there irresolutely a moment; and then, with a sudden determination, walked quickly across the passage, and knocked at the opposite door.

'Who wants me at this unseemly hour? Oh, it is you of course, Miss Marriott!' and Miss Titheridge sat bolt upright, and glared stonily at the culprit through her spectacles.

'Ach, she is always so inconsiderate, this Meess,' echoed

the sympathising Fraulein.

Miss Titheridge was a tall, masculine-looking woman, with a spare figure and a Roman nose. Why do strong-minded women so often have Roman noses?

She was not bad-looking, and was even reported to have been handsome in her younger days, and prided herself greatly on her deportment. She wore rich silk dresses, and her spectacles had gold rims to them, and on state occasions she jangled an appalling array of massive gold fetters on her lean wrists.

Miss Caroline, on the contrary, had been a soft, helpless woman, a great sufferer, and much beloved by those who knew her. During her lifetime she had exercised a gentle influence on the sterner sister. It was noticed that Miss Titheridge was not so hard or severe when Caroline pleaded mercy.

'May I ask what is your errand, Miss Marriott?' observed Miss Titheridge drily, and with difficulty repressing a yawn, the long, ivory-coloured hand moving ominously to her lips.

'It is about Emmie, Miss Titheridge,' answered Queenie

hurriedly. 'She did not mean to be naughty, indeed—indeed she did not, only the lesson was too difficult for so young a child.'

'Was this the case, Fraulein?' demanded Miss Titheridge,

with a distrustful glance at the young governess.

'Ach nein; Meess has not told the truth. Meess had not given the class. I believe the little one is dull, stupid; does not, will not, do preparation,' and the heavy Teutonic face looked obstinate and lowering.

Queenie absolutely loathed this woman, and dreaded her as well. Was she not the present prime minister? Miss Titheridge might have relented; Fraulein never. In vain would poor Queenie protest, and beg off punishment for the

innocent little culprit.

'Indeed, indeed Emmie is not stupid; she was so bright, and learned so well; every one told me so; but she is easily frightened. Fraulein does not know how a word, a threat, scares her. The lesson was hard, and her head ached; indeed, she never meant to be inattentive.'

'Miss Marriott,' returned Miss Titheridge severely, as Fraulein shrugged her shoulders with a movement of dissent, 'do you not know by this time how useless it is to bring these sort of complaints to me? I never dispute Fraulein's authority in such cases. If Emmie were naughty and inattentive, she must suffer the penalty of her faults. I am sorry,' continued Miss Titheridge, still more severely, 'that I hear Emmie is never otherwise than inattentive; she does no credit to her teachers, or to my generosity.'

The steady brown light in Queenie's eyes burned ominously; it was evident that she controlled herself with diffi-

culty; the small, nervous hands worked quickly.

'We only ask for justice. Is it just,' with an inflection of passion in her voice, 'to shut up a young child in a cold, dark room, without food for hours, because she cannot do the task set her ! This is Emmie's only fault, Miss Titheridge.'

'Miss Marriott,' returned Miss Titheridge, in the freezing tone she used to refractory pupils, 'you are forgetting yourself. Fraulein is witness that you are forgetting yourself, and insulting your benefactress. No further words, I beg of you, except in apology for your intemperate speech. Fraulein

has sent Emmie to her room, and there she must remain. Please to return to the duties you are at present neglecting, and Miss Titheridge closed her lips rigidly, as though with the determination to speak no more.

For a moment Queenie hesitated; a passionate impulse came in the young girl's heart, a longing to tell the women before her what she thought of them, to pour out some of the scorn she felt for their cruelty and littleness, and then, shaking off the dust from that hated place, take her little sister by the hand and go forth into the wide world to seek their fortunes.

Queenie's better judgment triumphed over these wild feelings; it would only be preparing new miseries and fresh privations for Emmie to take such a step; they must endure a little longer. She did not dare trust herself to speak, but silently left the room.

### CHAPTER III

#### CATHY

'She loved me for the dangers I had passed,
And I loved her that she did pity them.'—SHAKESPEARE.

'Something unseen o'er all her form
Did nameless grace impart;
A secret charm, that won the way
At once into the heart.'—Rev. JOHN LOGAN.

SOLITARY confinement was a favourite mode of punishment at Granite Lodge; visits of condolence from sympathising friends were sternly interdicted. Nevertheless, many small culprits had been much comforted by peppermint lozenges or acid drops, surreptitiously conveyed to them in small screws of whitey-brown paper lowered down to the window. Notes hidden in the centre of a large currant-bun had even been forwarded to the unhappy prisoner; indeed, to carry provisions to the incarcerated victim was one of the chief amusements in the school.

Poor little Emmie was not a general favourite, and no relief parties had as yet charged up the garret stairs; no odd-shaped parcels had been smuggled under black silk aprons, and passed on by sleight of hand under Miss Titheridge's very nose; nevertheless, comfort was close at hand.

As Queenie closed the door of the little parlour she could hear the voices of the girls in the lower entry. There was not a moment to be lost if she wished to elude discovery. As she sped up the broad stone staircase she could hear the harsh, rebuking tones of Miss Tozer, the English governess,

with her favourite 'Silence, young ladies, if you please; no infringement of the rules can be permitted.'

Queenie knew well what she would see as she opened the garret door—the line of stooping shoulders against the light, the childish figure cowering down on the high, broad window-ledge; but she was hardly prepared for the words that greeted her.

'I am not a bit afraid; I have said my prayers twice

over; but I shan't open my eyes till you speak.'

'Em, darling, what do you mean?' exclaimed her sister,

much startled. 'Why it is only I, only Queenie.'

A gasp and long-drawn sigh of relief answered her, and then a pair of cold arms were thrown delightedly round her neck, and a still colder cheek laid against her own.

'Oh, you dear old thing to come to me. However did you manage it, with the Ogre and the Griffin at home?' by which delightful sobriquets Miss Titheridge and Fraulein

were often designated.

- 'Never mind how I managed it; I was determined to see you for a moment. I shall not be able to stop; the gong will sound for tea directly. Tell me what you meant just now.'
- 'Oh, it was nonsense; you will be angry with me,' returned Emmie, in a queer, ashamed voice, but nevertheless creeping closer to her sister.

'Am I ever angry with you, darling?'

'Never, never,' vehemently; 'only of course you must think it silly.'

'What if I do?' with reassuring calmness.

- 'At twelve years old one ought to be wiser,' returned poor Emmie, in a self-convicted tone. 'Of course I knew there was no old man wrapped in a cloak in that corner; only it was so dark, and Jane had forgotten to bring me a candle, and the stairs would creak, and there was such a funny noise, and——'
- 'Oh, Em, Em!' exclaimed her sister, in such a troubled voice that the child could only hang about her fondly, and promise not to be so silly any more.
- 'It was so wrong and foolish of me,' continued Emmie penitently, 'after all the beautiful stories you have told me

about guardian angels; but I suppose I am wicked because I can't bear the dark; and when there is a great silence I always seem to hear voices like little men underground, talking and laughing in a muffled sort of way; oh, such funny little voices, only they are not quite nice.'

'Now, Emmie, do you know this is quite absurd,' returned her sister, suppressing secret pangs of pity and fond terror, and trying to speak firmly. 'I wonder what mamma would say if she knew her little girl were such a coward, and thought such foolish things. I don't think we ought to be afraid in the darkness which God has made,' continued Queenie, whose healthy young vitality knew none of the mysterious terrors that afflict weaker and more imaginative temperaments. 'And then we are never alone, dear—never, in any sense of the word. I am sure our good guardian spirit would never be allowed to leave us for a moment.'

'It would be nice if one saw the angel,' replied the child doubtfully.

'Anyhow we must have faith, dear. I am afraid your head has ached terribly over those horrid lessons.'

'Yes, it has been pretty bad,' in a patient voice.

'And you are cold; oh, so cold, Emmie.'

'I got the creeps, you know, and that always makes me cold; but I can bear that,' stoically.

'The meat was burnt, and so you had hardly any dinner, and now Miss Titheridge says you must have no tea; you must be starved, absolutely starved,' continued poor Queenie, rocking her in her strong young arms.

'Not quite, I only feel rather sick,' returned the little

prisoner bravely.

Emmie would not have confessed for worlds the odd gnawing and emptiness that preceded her feelings of sickness. She was somewhat dainty and fastidious with regard to food, and the burnt flavour had so nauseated her that she had literally eaten nothing of the portion sent her. No wonder she had the creeps, as she phrased it in her childish way, and she was shivering with cold and superstitious terror.

'You are making me miserable,' returned Queenie, in a broken voice. 'I am punished as well as you, Emmie. Are

you sure that you really attend in class? Fraulein declares that you never know your lessons.'

'I wish Miss Titheridge would not insist on my learning that tiresome German,' sighed Emmie. 'She wants me to keep up with May Trever. May is ever so much stupider than I,' continued Em, with no special regard to grammar; 'but Fraulein never raps her over the knuckles with a ruler, or gives her disgrace tickets.'

'Because May Trever is a canon's daughter,' returned her sister bitterly. 'She is not poor, or friendless, or an orphan—three sins for which we must answer. But tell me truly,

do you try your hardest to please Fraulein?'

'I do, I do indeed,' protested the child earnestly. 'Sometimes I know my lesson quite perfectly, and then, when she looks at me with those hard steel eyes, and comes out with that sharp "Now, little Meess, now,"—with a faint, dreary attempt at mimicry,—'it all goes out of my head; and then the mark is put down, and I go on from bad to worse. I don't think I am really stupid, Queenie, but I am afraid I shall get so.'

'No, you shall not; you must not,' with a shower of healing kisses on the little careworn face. 'Hark! there's

the gong, Emmie; I must go.'

'Must you?' in a dreary voice; and then followed a heavy

sigh.

'Listen to me, darling. You shall not be long alone. Miss Titheridge and Fraulein are going out to spend the evening, and I shall tell Miss Tozer that I have a headache, and must retire early. It will be quite true, you know. Go to bed now, and try to forget that you are cold and hungry; and then I will come up, and we will have a long, beautiful talk about the cottage, and Caleb, and all sorts of nice things. You won't fret any more, Emmie?'

'No-o-o,' hesitatingly; but two very large tears rolled down the thin cheeks when the door closed behind her comforter. 'Oh dear, oh dear,' sobbed the child; 'I should not like her to know how cold and hungry I am. I think I could eat a great hunch of dry bread if Jane would bring it me; but she is such a cross old thing, and I know she won't. I wish I had asked Queenie to hide a piece of bread and butter for me. Cathy did one day, and spoiled her pretty new

dress, because the butter would not come out. It is half-holiday, or else Cathy would have come up long ago. One time she brought me a Bath bun, and it was so good. I wonder if Queenie would think me wicked if I asked for something nice to eat in my prayers? No; I don't think it would be wicked, for I have not had my "daily bread" yet.'

Even the sour-tempered Miss Tozer relented with womanly compassion when she saw Queenie's pale face and heavy eyes. The girl could eat nothing. The hot weak tea seemed to choke her. The touch of the little cold hands and face seemed to haunt her. 'Cruel, cruel,' she muttered once between her teeth. Her hands clenched each other under the table-cloth.

'Emmie in disgrace again? Dear, dear, this is very sad. I hope all you young ladies will take example, and be more careful with your preparation,' observed Miss Tozer sententiously. 'Miss Marriott, I should recommend a little soda and salvolatile. I always find it an excellent remedy for a sick-headache.'

'I shall be glad if you can dispense with my services an hour earlier to-night,' returned Queenie hastily. 'I think rest will be better even than salvolatile—thank you all the same.'

'Just as you please,' returned Miss Tozer frigidly. Prescriptions were her hobby, and woe to the offender who refused the proffered remedy. But at Queenie's imploring glance she melted into something like good-nature. 'Well, you had better try both. I am afraid the themes must be corrected, unless you finished them this afternoon. I have pressing letters awaiting my attention this evening.'

'Very well; they shall be done,' responded Queenie wearily.

After all, it was not so much her head as her heart that ached. She went back to her old corner in the classroom, and worked away at the girls' blotted themes, while they sat round her whispering and laughing over their preparation.

It was not a cheerful scene. The two long deal tables were somewhat dimly lighted by lamps, which at times burnt low and emitted unpleasing odours. A governess sat at the head of each table, busied over writing or fancy-work. An

occasional 'Silence, young ladies,' in Miss Tozer's grating voice, alternated with Mademoiselle's chirping 'Taisez vous, mes chères demoiselles,' followed by momentary silence, soon broken by a titter. One of the girls, indeed, did not join in either the whispers or the titters, but worked on steadily, and to some purpose, for, to the surprise of her companions, she closed her books long before the allotted hour, and, with an explanatory word to Miss Tozer about tidying her drawers, left the room unseen by Queenie.

She was a tall girl, with an odd, characteristic face, colourless complexion, and bright dark eyes. She wore her hair in singular fashion, parted on one side, and brushed over her forehead in a long wave, and simply knotted behind.

Most people called Catherine Clayton plain, but to those who loved her this want of beauty was redeemed by an excessive animation, and by an expression of amiability and bonhommie that was singularly attractive.

Her figure was erect and graceful. She walked, ran, and danced equally well. Movement was a necessity to her; in some moods repose was impossible. In her gestures she had the freedom and unconscious dignity of a young Indian squaw.

Catherine, or Cathy, as she was generally called by her intimate friends, had struck up a warm friendship with Queenie on the first day they met. Queenie's strange eyes drew her like magnets; their troubled pathos stimulated curiosity and invited pity. Queenie's pride and independence, her quiet reserve, only charmed the younger girl.

Cathy made swift advances, but they were only repelled by the sad-looking young governess. Cathy, nothing daunted, turned her attention to Emmie, and won her heart in a trice, and from that moment Queenie succumbed.

When Queenie loved, she loved with her whole heart; half measures were impossible; she must give entire confidence, or none at all. Her reserve, once broken through, was broken for ever. She soon made her friends acquainted with the chequered story of her past life. She told Cathy the absolute blank of the future was perfectly appalling to her.

Cathy listened and pitied, and started all sorts of vague Utopian schemes that should ameliorate the condition of her favourites.

CATHY

Her own life had no bitter background. She was indeed a motherless orphan, but she had been so very young when her parents died that the cloud had hardly shadowed her. She spoke of them affectionately, as of some dear unknown friends.

Queenie knew all about Cathy's home—the grey old house at Hepshaw, overlooking the churchyard and the plane-tree walk. She had even pictured to herself the granite quarries, where Garth Clayton spent long hard-working days.

where Garth Clayton spent long hard-working days.

Cathy was never weary of talking about Garth. She would expatiate for hours on his virtues. Was he not the stay and prop of the little household? Did not even Langley, the motherly elder sister, go to him for advice and counsel? The handsome younger brother—tall, lazy Ted—was spoken about more seldom.

'Ted is just Ted,' Cathy would say sometimes, in reply to Queenie's half quizzical interrogations. 'A dear old fellow, of course; but he cannot hold a candle to Garth. Why, Garth is a perfect king in Hepshaw. There is no one more respected. The work he does among the quarrymen perfectly astonishes our vicar. He has classes for them, and teaches them himself, and plays cricket with them, and gets up entertainments and lectures in the schoolroom. Why, the men perfectly adore him.'

'How I should like to live at Hepshaw!' Queenie would answer sometimes, sighing—she hardly knew why.

Cathy's descriptions somehow fascinated her oddly. The little straggling market town, with its long, winding street or road; the old Deerhound Inn; the white workhouse, the church and vicarage, standing high, and overlooking the town, and set prettily among plane-trees; the dark old 'Churchstile House,' with its gloomy entry, and back windows looking over the ancient monuments and tombstones—Queenie could see them all. She could even fancy herself walking up the steep, narrow garden of the Vicarage, between tall bushes of roses and lavender.

'The Vicarage is such an ugly, bare-looking little house; quite a shabby cottage; only Mr. Logan has made it so comfortable, and has added a room to it—such a nice room, which he has made out of the stable. I think you would like Mr. Logan, Queenie; he is quite old—nearly forty, I should

think. People say he is very plain, but I think he has a nice, clever face; and he is such a character, and wears such old, patched coats, and Miss Cosie always calls him Kit, or "Christopher, my dear."

'And who might Miss Cosie be?' Queenie asked, with an

amused air; she dearly loved Cathy's descriptions.

'Oh, Miss Cosie was Charlotte Logan; she was his sister, and kept his house. Every one called her Miss Cosie, even the poor people; it was a name she got when a child.' No, she could not describe her; she was a little woman with two big brown curls and kind eyes, and she always wore a soft grey Shetland shawl, and cooed out her words in a soft, plaintive fashion; she only wished Queenie could see her, and then Queenie sighed again.

These sort of conversations fascinated Queenie; Cathy's girlish egotism never wearied her. Garth Clayton was almost as great a hero to her as he was in his sister's eyes; she had never heard of such a man. How good he must be! She used to try to picture him to herself. 'Garth is tall and good-looking; every one likes his face,' was Cathy's somewhat vague description. Queenie used to long to hear more.

His handwriting was quite familiar to her; she often admired the firm, clear characters when Cathy read aloud

amusing passages from his letters.

How Queenie longed for such a brother! Such a manly, protecting tenderness breathed in every line: in his injunctions to his dear little Catherine not to be homesick or neglect her studies, in his playful hints or merry descriptions

of the friends and pets she had left.

'Your parrot is inconsolable, and shrieks disconsolately in our ears from morning to night, much to Langley's annoyance,' he wrote once. 'Ted threatens to wring its neck. I am quite sorry for the poor thing, and I believe it understands my sympathy, for it sidles up to me and looks at me with yellow, lack-lustre eyes, as much as to say, "Where's our Cathy, old fellow?" and then clambers up my coat sleeve with beak and claw, and settles itself on my shoulder to be petted, which I suppose I do for your sake, and because poor Polly has no other friend.'

'There, is not that like him?' Cathy cried, with sparkling

eyes. 'He is always so good to any helpless creature; he has sympathy even with my poor Polly. Mr. Logan always says unhappiness or poverty is a sure passport to Garth's heart.'

'How sorry he would be for Emmie and me,' thought poor Queenie, but she did not put her thoughts into words.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE FEAST IN THE GARRET

. 'We fell to work and feasted like the gods,
Like labourers, or like eager workhouse folk
At Yule-tide dinner; or, to say the whole
At once, like tired, hungry, healthy youth.'

JEAN INGELOW.

QUEENIE, absorbed in the themes she was correcting, was not aware of Cathy's absence from the room.

As she toiled on, correcting faulty grammar and replacing obnoxious terms, she was consumed with terrible anxiety. Emmie's thin white face came between her and the page. 'What can I do to save her from this life?' was her one inward ejaculation.

She rose quite exhausted with the mental strain when her work was finished. The great stone hall with its one lamp looked dreary enough as she traversed it; all manner of weird shadows lurked in the corners of the landing-place. A rising wind moaned in the ivy outside, and shook the bare branches of the trees till they creaked under it; the moon slid wildly through the black clouds. Queenie thought of Emmie with a little shiver of apprehension, and hurried on.

'Here I am. Are you tired of waiting for me?' she exclaimed, in a tone of enforced cheerfulness, almost before she opened the door; and then she started back, and a little cry of surprise and pleasure broke from her lips at the changed aspect of the garret.

The scene was certainly unique.

The rickety table, covered with an old red shawl of

Queenic's, was drawn close to the bed; two candles, one green and the other yellow, burnt cheerily in two broken medicine bottles; a few late-blooming roses in a soap-dish gave an air of elegance to the whole. A bottle of ginger wine, and various delicacies in the shape of meat pies, tarts, and large sticky Bath buns, were tastefully arranged at intervals, flanked by a pocket corkscrew, a pen-knife, tumbler, and small tin plate.

Emmie, propped up with pillows and huddled up in a warm plaid belonging to Cathy, regarded this magnificent feast with bright-eyed astonishment; she clapped her hands

at the sight of her sister.

'Oh, Queenie, I am so glad you have come. Everything is ready now, only Cathy has gone down to fetch something; she has been planning this delightful surprise all day. Is it not kind of her?'

'Listeners never hear any good of themselves, so I had better make my appearance,' interposed a laughing voice, at which Queenie turned hastily round.

'Oh, Cathy, Cathy, what should we do without you!' she

cried, looking gratefully at her friend.

Cathy's eyes grew a little moist, and then she broke into a

low musical laugh delicious to hear.

'Have I not done it well?' rocking herself with merriment.
'Not a creature suspects anything. I shall go down presently and pretend to eat supper. Are not those candles lovely, Queenie? they make this dismal old room quite cheerful. There, wrap yourself up in my sealskin, while I help Emmie.'

'Isn't it lovely?' sighed Emmie, in a tone of such heartfelt happiness that Cathy hugged her on the spot. The cakes, the meat pies, the ginger wine, seemed enchanted food to her; the roses, the coloured candles, were perfectly radiant in her eyes. 'It is just like a fairy story. You are our good fairy, Cathy,' she cried; 'I am sure I love you next best in the world to Queenie.'

'How I wish Garth could see us!' laughed Cathy. She had enveloped herself in an old grey plaid, and had put one of the roses in her hair, and with her dark hair and eyes looked not unlike a gipsy. 'Langley would be dreadfully shocked, but Garth would laugh first and lecture afterwards.'

'You are always talking about Garth; I wish I could see him,' sighed Emmie. 'You never make us see him, Cathy.'

Cathy pondered a moment. 'It is not easy to describe people with whom you live; one is afraid of being too much prejudiced in their favour. I don't think I am wrong in calling Garth handsome, because every one says so.'

'Every one is sure to be right,' put in Queenie quietly. She did not like to betray her interest, but she had always longed to be able to picture Garth. 'He is tall,' she hazarded

rather timidly.

'Yes, tall and fine-looking. He is eight and twenty, you know: he has a nice thoughtful face, rather pale; and his mouth is very firm, and shuts tightly, only the moustache hides it; and his eyes are blue-grey, just the colour I like for a man, and they look kind and gentle; and then he looks so good, as though he could never do anything wrong or mean.'

'He must be a nice man,' exclaimed Emmie enthusiastic-

ally. 'Then he is not like you, Cathy?'

'No,' she returned regretfully; 'Langley and I are alike, only Langley is older and worn-looking; she is four years older than Garth—just thirty-two in fact—quite an old maid,' continued the girl of eighteen, in a tone of profound pity.

'I don't think people of thirty ought to be considered quite middle-aged,' remonstrated Queenie, who had long ago

achieved her twentieth year.

'Not some people perhaps, but Langley looks dreadfully old; one can't tell how it was that she was considered so handsome. Her features are good, but she looks so thin and worn, and she is paler than I am, and her hair is turning grey. Langley is very nice, and good to us all, but I sometimes think that she leads too dull a life; Garth often says so. I know he will be glad that I am to go home next quarter.'

'Oh, Cathy, how shall we be able to endure this place

without you?' interposed her friend.

Emmie had waxed drowsy with comfort, and was dozing placidly, and the two girls had curled themselves up for warmth on the bed. Cathy had disappeared for a short time, and had come back with the announcement that the Ogre and Griffin were still out, and the other governesses at supper.

'My having a bedroom to myself makes it easier to evade

rules,' explained Cathy. 'I have put the bolster and some clothes in the bed, and drawn the counterpane well over them, and Mademoiselle will just peep in and think I am asleep. Oh, what fun it is! How many suppers have we had in this old garret?'

'We shall soon have seen the last of them,' returned Queenie sorrowfully. 'I can't bear to think of your going

away.'

'Poor old Queen!' responded her friend affectionately. 'It is very sad, leaving you and Emmie behind in this mousetrap of a place. When I go home I mean to talk to Garth and Langley about you. Langley is so good, she is sure to

invite you and Emmie for the summer holidays.'

'Oh, Cathy, do you think so? do you really think so?' and Queenie almost gasped with surprise and joy. To take Emmie into the country again, to see the little pinched face grow round and blooming in the fine moorland air, to watch her gathering wildflowers, or scrambling through woods—could it ever come true? For the first moment Queenie forgot everything but her little sister; the next her cheek flushed crimson—she would see Cathy's home and Garth.

'Do you really, really think it will come true?'

'True! of course it will. Garth and Langley never refused me anything, and when I tell them about you and Emmie they will be wild to know you. What walks we will have! I must show you Hepshaw Abbey, and I must bribe Garth to drive us to Karlsmere; it is such a lovely lake. And then we can go and see the King of Karldale.'

'See whom?' inquired Queenie, in some perplexity.

'Oh, a friend of ours, who is called by that name; he is a gentleman farmer, and lives near the head of the lake. His real name is Harry Chester, but he is always called the King of Karldale. I am very fond of Harry.'

'Indeed,' with a slight stress.

- 'He is such a dear good fellow. I wish I could like his wife half as well.'
- 'Oh, he is married,' with a shade of disappointment in her voice.
- 'Married! very much so, poor fellow, and I don't think he quite likes it. She does not exactly henpeck him, but she

is a fine lady, and worries him into doing things he does not like, such as taking her to Paris, and giving her expensive dresses. I am afraid she spends a great deal too much money, and that troubles Harry.'

'He should keep her in order then.'

'I think he tries; but Gertrude has a will of her own. She frets when he refuses to humour her, and as she is very delicate, and the doctors look very gravely at her sometimes, he is afraid not to give her her way. He sometimes talks to Langley, and she always takes Gertrude's part—why, I don't know, for no one else likes her.'

'How nice to know people, and to get interested in their lives,' sighed the poor recluse. 'You have made me quite long to know all the people in your neighbourhood, especially

Mr. Logan and his sister.'

'Dear Miss Cosie, how she will pet you; and you will be great friends with Mr. Logan. Do you know,' in a puzzled voice, 'I don't seem to get on with Mr. Logan as well as I did; he gave me lectures last holidays, and I became a little shy of him.'

'And yet you are not one to mind any amount of

scolding.'

'Of course not, when I don't care about the people who give the scolding; but that is just it. Mr. Logan looks at one so benevolently, and yet his eyes seem to read one through and through; and then he goes on in that mild voice of his, till Miss Catherine, as he calls her, either makes a fool of herself or runs out of the room.'

'But he has no right to lecture you,' indignantly.

'Ah, has he not!' sighed Cathy, and the dark, brilliant eyes looked very serious for a moment. 'He says we girls at the present day have such a low standard of right that we never rise above medium goodness, and are too easily satisfied with ourselves. He is always saying we have no great saints nowadays, and that there can be no St. Augustines without Monicas.'

'It is very true.'

'Oh, he is such a good man, he makes one feel ashamed of one's self. When he talks one forgets his patched coat and plain face. I used to laugh when he pushed his spectacles The same of the sa

up in that droll way, but somehow nothing seems odd about him now.'

'And he is not married?'

- 'No, he is an old bachelor, and Miss Cosie keeps his house. I don't think he has ever been in love; Miss Cosie said so one day; he has never been able to find a woman with a sufficiently high standard, I suppose. Even Langley would not suit him, though I believe he thinks very highly of her; they have such long, serious talks. Queenie, do you recollect remarking one day that I never used slang now?'
  - 'To be sure I do.'
  - 'Well, he cured me.'
  - 'Oh, I can comprehend the purport of the lectures now.'
- 'Yes, he gravely remonstrated with me one day. "Miss Catherine," he once said, "does it ever strike you to inquire if the high-born ladies of old time ever talked slang?"

'Well, I hope you answered him properly.'

'No, I was very saucy; I told him I had no doubt they were often "awfully jolly," and were fast and slow and spoony no end like other people, and some of the men dreadful duffers and cads.'

'Cathy, how could you?'

'My dear, it was the last outburst. Before an hour was over I was fairly crushed, and took a private vow never to utter anything but the purest English ever afterwards. It was very hard at first, and I had to inflict dreadful pinches on myself, and put endless pennies in the poor's-box, before I could remember; but I am cured since.'

'Yes, and it is such an improvement; I feel very much

obliged to Mr. Logan.'

'I took my revenge though,' returned Cathy, looking a little guilty; 'I went away without bidding him good-bye.'

'That was hardly kind.'

'So he said. I was very remorseful, and wrote him a penitent little note a week afterwards. The letter I got in return made me feel very small.'

'I daresay he forgave you.'

'Dear old Saint Christopher, I know he did; but he was terribly hurt; Langley told me so. I often think we are

"old men of the mountain" to ourselves. How one longs sometimes to throw off one's self and one's faults!

'You have less than any one I know,' returned Queenie, who had a warm admiration for the daring and generous-

hearted girl.

'You are wrong,' returned Cathy humbly; 'Mr. Logan knows me best. I do want to be true, as true as I know how to be. I think I hate conventional shams as much as he does; it is this want of truth in the world that appals one.'

'And the lack of kindness,' put in Queenie, who had seen the darker side of human nature.

'No, indeed there is plenty of kindness in the world. You have grown misanthropic with hard usage; you will

change your mind when you come among us.'

'Yes, you must make allowances for me,' she said, somewhat sadly; 'I have been too much in contact with coarse, selfish minds to judge leniently. Cathy, How can women be so censorious to their own sex? how can they oppress and grieve a little child in the way Miss Titheridge and Fraulein oppress Emmie?'

'It is too bad; but I think Miss Titheridge is obtuse;

she does not understand Emmie.'

'Do you not think she is changed?' whispered Queenie, with a glance at the sleeping child. 'She has grown thinner and paler, and her eyes are so hollow. Caleb noticed it last week.'

'She is growing, and needs care,' was the compassionate answer, as Cathy rose and folded the shawl closer round the

sleeper.

'Care! that is just what she does not get. Oh, Cathy, I think poor mamma would have broken her heart if she had known what was in store for us; she was so fond of Emmie.'

'Hush, dear,' for Queenie had covered her face with her hands, and was weeping bitterly now. 'We will not talk any more; you are weary and overtasked. You are very brave, my Queen, and seldom break down, but you are too tired to cry to-night.'

'Yes, it is wrong of me, but yet it has done me good,' she whispered, after a short interval.

They were still sitting together, hand in hand. The green candle had burnt out, but the pink one still burnt cheerily; one or two of the roses had withered; the fragments of the feast still reposed on the old red shawl; the moonbeams stole through the uncurtained window, and played fitfully on the uneven floor; a little pale face slept peacefully under the old wrapper.

By and by, when Cathy had left her, Queenie lay down, and drew the warm, sleeping child to her arms. The moon had come out from behind the clouds now; the stream of pale, silvery light flooded the room; a perfect halo shone round Emmie's fair hair. Queenie shivered, and gave a faint

sob as she saw it.

'She is paler and thinner,' she said to herself. 'Cathy noticed it, and so did Caleb. They are killing her by inches, and yet they will not see; they are straining her mind and body, and neither will bear it. Oh, mamma, mamma, she would be better off with you; but I cannot spare her, I cannot spare Emmie!'

'Are you awake, Queenie? Oh, I have had such a beautiful dream. I was in a strange place, and mamma came to me, looking so kind, just like her old self, only grander; I think she had a crown on her head; and she took me in her arms and kissed me, just as she used to do, and told me to be good and patient, and to do as you told me, and that she loved us both.'

Sleep on, little comforter, in the arms that hold you so lovingly. The strain is lessened, the weary oppression gone. The child's dream, so lovingly told, has brought healing to the weary sister. The unseen guardian watched over them both, the message of love had come to her too, and in this fond belief Queenie fell asleep.

### CHAPTER V

### CALEB RUNCIMAN

'Why what a pettish, petty thing I grow,
A mere, mere woman, a mere flaccid nerve,
A kerchief left all night in the rain,
Turned soft so—overtasked and overstrained
And overlived in this close London life!
And yet I should be stronger.'—AUEGRA LEIGH.

ONE wet evening, towards the end of November, Caleb Runciman stood at the window of his little parlour, straining his eyes wistfully into the darkness.

'A wild night,' he muttered to himself more than once; 'it is raining whole bucketfuls, and blowing hard. She will never venture out with the child, and so careful as she is too, bless her dear little motherly heart. I may as well tell Molly to make the tea. Dear, dear, how contrariwise things will happen sometimes!' with which oracular remark the old man rubbed his hands ruefully together, and turned to the fire.

It was a wild night certainly. A cold, gusty rain swept the streets of Carlisle; the flickering lamplight shone on glittering pools and dripping water-spouts; the few pedestrians hurried past Caleb's window, casting furtive glances at the warm, inviting gleam from within.

Caleb's fire blazed cheerily; a faggot spluttered and hissed half up the little chimney; the blue china pixies on the oldfashioned tiles fairly danced in the light, as did the Dresden shepherdesses, and the two simpering figures in umbrella courtship on the high wooden mantelpiece.

These tiles were Emmie's delight. She would sit on the stool at Caleb's feet for hours, following the innocent, baby-faced pixy through a hundred fanciful adventures. The little gentleman in the pink china waistcoat and the lady in the blue scarf were veritable works of art to her. The plaster group of the Holy Family, slightly defaced by smoke and time, excited in her the same profound reverence that a Titian or a Raphael excites in an older mind. She never could be made to understand that the black-framed battle of Trafalgar, painted in flaming reds and yellows, was not a masterpiece; there was nothing incongruous to her in the spectacle of Nelson's dying agonies portrayed amid the stage effects of a third-rate pantomime; to her the ludicrous was merged in the sublime. It is not in early youth that the one trails so often on the other.

The candles on the little round table were still unlighted, but there was plenty of light to show signs of unwonted preparations. Caleb had robbed the plot of ground he called his garden ruthlessly before he filled the large, wide-mouthed jug with violet and white china asters. The display of preserves in all colours too, not to mention an astounding plum-cake with frosted edges, showed some unusual festivity.

Caleb's round rosy face elongated considerably as he sat in his wooden rocking-chair, warming his hands over the blaze.

'Dear, dear, she'll cry her eyes out, poor lamb, and no wonder; and such a beautiful cake too as Molly has made,' he continued disconsolately. 'I wonder if the old cat would open the parcel if I sent it wrapt up in brown paper, with Caleb Runciman's kind regards to Miss Emmie. I'll lay a wager the poor little angel would never eat a crumb of it. Hark! surely that was not a knock; I daresay it is only the paper-boy.'

Caleb's cogitations soon came to an abrupt end. There was an exclamation of surprised dismay in Molly's loud, cheerful voice, then quick footsteps, and the entrance of two dripping figures.

'My dear Miss Queenie and the precious lamb, whoever would have thought it!' cried Caleb, in a voice quite trembling

with joy, but shaking his head all the time. 'It will be the death of both of you. Molly! Where is that woman? Molly, it will be the death of these dear creatures if you don't make tea quick, and get off their wet things. Miss Queenie, I am surprised at you. Dear, dear, such a night. I must say I am surprised,' continued Caleb, trying to speak severely, but with his blue eyes twinkling with animation.

'Emmie fretted so that I was obliged to bring her,' returned Queenie apologetically. 'It was wrong, I know; I have been blaming myself all the way; but what could I do?'

'Now, Caleb, don't be cross, and on my birthday too,' interrupted Emmie, throwing her arms round the old man's neck. 'I thought of your disappointment, and the cake, and the dear old parlour, and I could not help crying; and then Queenie put on her determined face, and said I should go if she carried me. Cathy was so angry with us both, and no wonder.'

'No, indeed; I must say I was extremely surprised,' reiterated Caleb, who never liked to lose a leading idea, and was fond of repeating his own words. 'Mark my words, Miss

Queenie, it will be the death of Emmie.'

'Nonsense, Caleb,' interrupted the child; 'I won't have you scold Queenie; she carried me nearly all the way, she did indeed; she said I was quite light. And she is so tired, and she made me wear her cloak, because it was long, and would cover me, and I am so warm and dry; but I know her poor feet are wet, because her boots are so thin and old, terribly old.'

'Oh, hush, Em; how can you!' returned her sister, blushing

hotly; 'you will make Caleb so unhappy.'

'You both of you go near to break my heart,' replied the old man huskily, as he knelt down, and took the old shabby boot in his hand. 'Miss Queenie, dear, this is not right; you will lay yourself up, and then what will Emmie do? Where is the money I gave you last time you were here, when I begged and prayed you to get a new pair?'

'She bought ever so many things for me,' broke in Emmie again. 'No, I won't hush, Queenie,' as her sister vainly strove to silence her. 'I said I would tell Caleb, and I will. I have warm flannels, and gloves, and mittens, and Queenie

has nothing; and she is so cold that she never gets warm

all day; and Cathy says it is a shame.'

'Oh, Miss Queenie, Miss Queenie,' was all Caleb's answer, as the old fingers fumbled and bungled over their work. Perhaps it was an unusually large pinch of snuff that dimmed his eyes for a moment, and that obliged him to have recourse to the red spotted silk handkerchief.

Queenie was used to be waited upon by her kind old friend. She allowed her cold feet to be encased in a pair of list slippers that Molly had made for Caleb. A pleasant feeling of warmth and comfort began to steal over her, a luxurious sense of being cared for. Emmie had already installed herself at the tea-tray, and was holding the teapot carefully with both hands; her work was cut out for her for the evening. She had to make tea for Caleb and Queenie, and then fill Caleb's pipe, and sit at his knee and chatter to him of all they had been doing; then she had to visit Molly in her nice clean kitchen, and play with Sukey and her kittens. How she longed for a kitten in the old garret in Granite Lodge, only Queenie shook her head at the bare idea.

To-night Molly was ironing her master's shirts, and Emmie's visit was paid earlier than usual, that she might help her by washing up the tea-things, a piece of play-work that was charming to the little girl.

As soon as she had left them, Caleb put down his pipe, and drew his chair closer to Queenie, and laid his wrinkled

hand on hers.

'Well, my dear, well! and how has the world been treating you lately?' for the quiet, thoughtful face he had been watching all the evening seemed to him to have grown sadder since he last saw it.

'You must not ask me, my dear old friend,' returned the girl sorrowfully; 'I have been losing heart lately.'

'Nay, nay, that's bad hearing.'

'One must speak the truth. I have lost not only heart, but courage. If it were not for Emmie I could battle on; I am strong and tough enough for anything, but she makes me weak.'

<sup>&#</sup>x27;Nay, surely.'

'Do not misunderstand me,'—as the kind old hand stroked hers gently,—'I could not bear you to do that. I am strong, I do not complain, I am young and healthy, and a little hardness will not hurt me; but it is for Emmie I fear. Caleb,' in an almost inaudible voice, 'what they make me suffer through her!'

'I know it, I know it,' rubbing up his grey hair restlessly.

'She is getting thinner every day, and losing appetite, and there is a nervous look in her eyes that I do not like. Miss Titheridge will not see it; I think sometimes she dislikes Emmie; she and Fraulein are harder on her than ever.'

'There now, there now, poor lambs, poor orphaned lambs,'

broke in the compassionate Caleb.

'They are driving me to the verge of distraction, and they know it,' continued Queenie, in the same strange, suppressed voice; 'things cannot go on like this much longer. Caleb, I shall frighten you, but I have made up my mind to do something desperate, and to do it at once: I mean to go to Mr. Calcott.'

Caleb's hands dropped on his knees, and his eyes grew round and fixed, 'Miss Queenie!' he gasped at length.

'I shall go to him,' repeated the young girl quietly, 'and tell him about Emmie.'

'But—but he will never see you, my dear young lady; you must be mad or dreaming. See Mr. Calcott! it is a

preposterous idea—preposterous—pre——'

Hush! when have you ever known me fail in anything I have undertaken? It is a waste of words to try and dissuade me. All last night I lay thinking it out, till my brain reeled. I may do no good—Heaven knows what manner of man I have to deal with; but all the same I will speak to him, face to face, and tell him what is in my heart.'

'Heaven preserve the young creature, for she is certainly daft!' groaned Caleb; and here he positively wrung his hands. 'The lamb in the lion's den; that is what it will be. Miss Queenie, dear,' he said coaxingly, 'I am thirty or forty years older than you; be guided by an old friend, and put this thought out of your head.'

Queenie shook her head.

'It will do no good to Emmie, and only anger him against

you both. He is an old man now, and ailing; and some say he suffers a good deal at times, and then he gets almost beside himself. You do not know to what you expose yourself.'

'Besides,' finding the girl still remained silent, 'you may even turn him more against you. Sometimes I have seen him start and bite his lip when the school has passed our office window; he never fails to recognise it, and he seems disturbed and put out for minutes afterward. You see his sin lies heavy on him—the sin of those wicked words, Miss Queenie.'

'Yes, yes, I know,' she interrupted hastily, 'and most likely he repents. Caleb, it is useless; nothing you can say will shake my resolution. Things have come to this pass, that I would rather beg my bread than be indebted any longer to Miss Titheridge. If we stay there Emmie will die, and then what good will my life be to me.'

The old man shook his head reproachfully. 'Miss Queenie,

you know what you have refused?'

'Yes,' she returned, looking at him with a smile that made her face absolutely beautiful, 'yes, dear old friend; but it was right. You were too old to work for us, too old to be burthened with two such helpless creatures; and then how were we to know whether Mr. Calcott's anger might not have been turned on you. Were we to bring trouble on our only friend?'

'I said,' continued Caleb in a broken voice, 'that as long as I had a crust of bread and a cup of water, and a roof, however humble, I would share them with you and Emmie.'

'And my answer,' continued the girl softly, as she lifted the wrinkled hand to her lips, 'my answer was that Emmie and I loved you too well to bring sorrow and ruin on you. Caleb, Emmie is dearer to me than anything in the world; but I would rather lose her than do such a thing.'

'Ah, you were always so proud and self-willed,' ejaculated

Caleb sorrowfully.

'Then I am proud of my pride; I rejoice in a self-will that prevents me from harming so deeply one whom I love. You have given us more than crusts—you have shared with us a nobler shelter than your roof, for you have warmed us

through and through with a kindness that has known no stint or limit; and Emmie and I will bless you for it all our lives.'

'Don't, don't, Miss Queenie; I cannot bear you to say such

things.'

'But I will say them—I must say them; when you call me proud and self-willed, I must defend myself, and get the last word; I am only a woman, you know.'

'God bless such women, I say.'

'You have the spirit of a little child, Caleb; so doubtless you will be heard. Blessings are long in coming to us I think, and I am growing hard and discontented in consequence; but you and Cathy have often saved me from hopeless infidelity.'

'Good heavens! what do you mean!'

'Yes, from infidelity—that utter and hopeless disbelief in one's fellow-creatures. When I find myself growing cynical, I just say, "There are Caleb and Cathy; the world cannot be wholly bad with two such good creatures in it," and that thought rests me.'

'Aye, aye, it is too old a head on young shoulders; people don't often think and say such things. You are

rarely clever for your age, Miss Queenie.'

'One can think without being clever,' returned the girl, with a slight smile. 'Cathy and I have strange talks sometimes; we often bewilder and lose ourselves. I have no one as Cathy has to set me right. It must be very nice to have a brother.'

'Aye, I had a brother once,' returned Caleb dreamily; 'he was deformed, poor fellow, a hunchback; but every one liked Joe. I was only a little chap when he died, but I have never forgotten him yet; some of his sharp sayings come into my mind when I sit here smoking my pipe.'

'A strong, wise, elder brother,—some one to trust,—and who would care for me,' continued Queenie reflectively. 'I think Cathy must be a happy girl. Hark! that is nine

striking; I must go and find Emmie.'

'I have ironed lots of handkerchiefs, all the beautiful blue and white spotted ones,' cried Emmie, rushing in, red and glowing, 'and Molly has been telling me such lovely stories. I think Molly quite the handsomest woman I have

ever seen after Queenie, she is so nice and rosy.'

'Come, Em, come,' replied the elder sister quietly; 'it is raining so fast, dear, and the wind will blow you away unless you keep close to me. Bid Caleb good-night, and let us go.'

How dark and wet it is, cried poor Emmie, as the door of her child's paradise closed behind her, and the grey frowning portico of Granite Lodge loomed on her distant vision. 'Oh, Queenie, why must we not go and live with Caleb, and leave this horrid, hateful prison of ours?'

'Hush, pet; shall I tell you a story? but perhaps you cannot hear my voice in the wind. What! tired, darling, already? Suppose I carry you again just for fun! It is

dark, and no one will see us.'

'Yes, just for fun,' returned the child wearily; 'if you are not tired, Queenie. Mind you put me down when you are tired.'

'Of course; you are so dreadfully heavy;' but the little joke died away into something like a sob as she lifted the thin, weak figure in her strong young arms, and struggled bravely through the storm.

# CHAPTER VI

'YOU ARE EMMIE'S UNCLE!'

'So speaking, with less anger in my voice Than sorrow, I rose quickly to depart.' CURWEN LEIGH.

QUEENIE MARRIOTT was right in asserting that she never failed to undertake anything on which she had really made up her mind. Strong impulses were rare with her; but now and then they gained the mastery, and overbore all dread of opposing obstacles. At such times the forces of her mind lay dormant; argument could not shake; persuasion, even conviction, availed nothing. In such moods Queenie was inexorable, and triumphed in the exercise of her self-will.

'I have nothing to lose in this matter, and all to gain,' she had said to Cathy. On the afternoon of the next half-holiday she had arrayed herself, with the stoicism of a young Spartan, and, with the help of feminine art and cunning arrangement, had even given a certain style to her shabby garments.

'No one could take you for anything but a lady,' Cathy said, as she watched her, half curiously and half enviously; I mean 'when people look at you they will not notice what you wear. I wish I knew where you learnt deportment, my dear Madam Dignity. There,' as Queenie buttoned her old gloves with a resolute air, 'I cannot even lend you my pretty new ones, they would be ever so much too large.'

Never mind, returned Queenie with a smile; 'my plumes bomely, certainly, but they are not borrowed. Take care

The second secon

of Emmie for me, and wish me good luck, for I am certainly

leading the forlorn hope.'

Queenie had preserved a gallant demeanour in Granite Lodge, but she slackened her footsteps and drew her breath a little unevenly when she came in sight of Mr. Calcott's house, a large grey stone building with dark outside shutters, and a high portico over the gate resembling the entrance to a tomb. Queenie thought of the thin austere-looking man who eyed their ranks so gloomily with a sudden failure of courage and an ominous beating in the regions of the heart; but the bell was already ringing in strange hollow fashion, and the next moment she was confronted by a grey-haired butler.

'Does Mr. Calcott live here? could I see him for a moment on business?' It must be owned that Queenie's voice was somewhat faint at this juncture; the sombre hall,

the morose face of the man, a little daunted her.

'People on business always call at the office down the town. Mr. Calcott is not very well, but Mr. Smiler or Mr. Runciman could see you,' returned the man civilly enough, but with an evident desire to close the door in her appealing face.

'It is not exactly business, but my errand is very pressing. If he be not very ill I must see him,' pleaded Queenie with a

desperation evoked by emergency.

'My master does not see visitors when he is suffering from gout,' persisted the man, with a pointed stress on the word visitors. 'I will take your card if you like, but I fear it will be little use.'

'I have no card,' faltered Queenie; 'I do not want to send my name, though he knows it well. Please tell him a young lady wishes to speak to him on a matter of great importance; tell him how grateful I shall be if he will grant me a five minutes' interview.'

The man hesitated; but Queenie's face and voice evidently prepossessed him in her favour; for after another glance he closed the door and ushered her into a small waiting-room leading out of the hall, with a cold, fireless grate, and a horse-hair sofa and chairs placed stiffly against the wall. There was a picture of Strafford led out to execution over the mantelpiece, which somehow attracted Queenie oddly.

'Surely the anticipation must be worse than the reality,' she thought; 'one is a coward beforehand. Never mind if I can only find words to tell him the truth when the time comes. I am not the first who has to suffer for trying to do the right thing.'

Queenie was cheering herself up in sturdy fashion, but she turned a little pale, nevertheless, when the servant re-entered and bade her follow him. 'The execution will soon be over,' she said to herself, as she rose; 'only in my case perhaps

the pain will not cease.'

They had passed through the large square hall, dimly lighted from above, and had turned down a side passage shut in with red baize doors; through one of these was an inner one, which the servant threw open, and Queenie found herself in a small room, furnished as a library, with a bright fire burning in a steel grate, and a cushioned chair beside it with a foot-rest, wherein sat a tall, thin old man, whom she at once recognised as Mr. Calcott. There was an instant's silence as she bowed and threw back her veil, during which he eyed her morosely, and pointed to his foot swathed in bandages.

'I cannot rise, you see,' he said, in a harsh voice that somewhat grated on her ear, 'neither can I keep a lady standing; please to be seated, while you tell me to what I am indebted for the pleasure of this interview; my servant

says you declined to give him your name.'

'I had reasons for doing so. I feared you might not see me,' returned Queenie, summoning all her resolution now the opportunity was gained. The hard mouth, the narrow, receding forehead, and the cold, grey eyes, of the man before her stifled every dawning hope. Would those eyes soften could those lines ever relax? He was an old man—older than she had thought, and there were traces of acute physical suffering in his face, but the hard tension of the muscles was terrible.

'Would you have seen me,' she continued steadily, 'if I had said my name was Marriott?'

'So you are Frank Marriott's daughter,' without the faintest token of surprise. 'I must own I suspected as much from Gurnel's description; but I am slightly at a loss to

discover what business Frank Marriott's daughter can pos-

sibly have with me.'

'I have come on no business of my own,' returned the girl proudly. 'I ask nothing from the world but the price of my own earnings. I would sooner starve'—with a sudden flush of irrepressible emotion—'than ask a favour from a stranger, even though he were the brother of my own dear stepmother. It is for Emmie's sake I have come to you, Mr. Calcott; Emmie, your own niece, your own flesh and blood, your sister's child.'

'I have always expected this,' muttered Mr. Calcott, as he refreshed himself with a pinch of highly-scented snuff; but a closer observer of human nature than Queenie would have detected a slight trembling in the white wrinkled hand.

'When my dear stepmother, your sister, died,' continued Queenie, speaking more calmly now, 'she called me to her bedside, and prayed me, for love of her, to watch over Emmie. I have kept my promise, and have done so; but I am only young, not much more than twenty, and I have no one to help me—no one but Mr. Runciman, who is so good to us, to give me advice and counsel; and now I feel that I cannot do my duty to Emmie.'

'Your conduct has been estimable, no doubt; but you must permit me to observe, my dear young lady, that I have not invited this confidence; on the contrary, it is distasteful to me. But doubtless you are only acting on Mr. Runciman's

advice !'

'No, indeed,' interposed the girl eagerly; 'he tried to dissuade me from coming to you; he seemed frightened when I proposed it; it is my own thought; I am acting on my own responsibility. I said to myself, "If he only knows what Emmie suffers, how often she is cold and hungry and sad, he will do something to make her poor life happier."

'My good young woman, no melodrama, if you please. I have all my life confined myself strictly to facts. Miss Titheridge's establishment for young ladies is the most respectable in Carlisle. I have heard much from my clients in her praise; no one has ever before informed me that her pupils are cold or half-starved—facts, if you please, facts.'

'I am speaking sober truth,' returned Queenie, colouring.

'I am one of Miss Titheridge's governesses, and, as far as I can tell, her pupils have no cause for complaint; it is only Emmie.'

Mr. Calcott shook his head incredulously, and took another pinch of snuff, this time somewhat irritably.

'I work for my own and Emmie's board,' she went on, 'and we pay a few pounds besides—all that we can spare. do not complain for myself that the accommodation is bad and the food insufficient, though it is so for a growing child; but the food is such that Emmie cannot eat it, and often and often I have seen her cry from sheer cold and misery.'

'Tut, some children will be fretful—aye, and dainty too.'

'Emmie is bred up in too hard a school for daintiness; she is wasting and pining for want of proper nourishment and care and kindness. They are killing her by inches,' continued Queenie, losing self-restraint and clasping her hands together. 'When she cannot learn they shut her up in a desolate garret at the top of the house, where she gets frightened and has gloomy fancies; they will not listen to me when I tell them she is weak and ill. She is getting so thin that I can carry her, and yet they will not see it.'

'Humph! all this is very pleasant. Young lady, you are determined to have your say, and I have let you say it; now you must listen to me. You are trying to plead the cause of Emily Calcott, my niece, to interest me in her favour. What if I tell you,' continued Mr. Calcott, raising his voice a little till it sounded harder and more metallic—'what if I tell you that I have no niece?'

'It would not be the truth, Mr. Calcott.'

'What if I tell you that I have renounced the relationship,' reiterated the old man, frowning at the interruption; 'what if I once had a sister Emily, but that from the time of her marriage she became nothing to me! She left me,' he went on, lashing himself into white passion by the remembrance of his wrongs, 'when she knew I was a lonely, suffering man, suffering mentally, suffering physically,-aye, when she knew too that she was the only thing spared to me out of the wreck of my life, that I cared for nothing in the world but her.'

'Could you not forgive her for loving my father?' inter-

posed Queenie softly.

'Pshaw! she had no love for him. She was fooled by a soft tongue and handsome face; she was to choose between us,—the invalid sorely-tried brother, who had cared for her all her life, and Frank Marriott,—and she chose him.'

'She did, and became our dearest blessing.'

'Aye, he valued his blessing,' with a sneer; 'he did not drag her down, and wear out her youth for her, eh? What does it matter what he did? From that day she was no sister of mine; I did not welcome her when she came to me, or feel grieved when she left.'

'Alas! we knew that too well when she came back to us

looking so sad and weary.'

'She told Frank Marriott that I repulsed and treated her cruelly, eh?'

'No, she never told him that; she bore her troubles silently, and brooded over them; but,' in a low voice, 'it helped to kill her.'

The veins on Mr. Calcott's forehead swelled visibly, and

his eyes became bloodshot.

'What, girl! you come into my house uninvited and accuse me of being my sister's murderer! Do you know I can have you up for libel and falsehood?'

'I never told a falsehood in my life,' returned Queenie simply; and somehow the young quiet voice seemed to soothe the old man's fury. 'Poor mamma was unhappy, and grew weaker and weaker; and so when the fever came she had no strength to throw it off. The doctors never expected her to die, but I did always. Once in the middle of the night I heard her say, "I ought never to have left Andrew—poor Andrew;" but I did not understand it then.'

'Aye, she repented! I knew she would. Listen to me, girl, and then you will know you have come to me on a fruit-less errand. Time after time she used to come crying to me, and asking me to lend her husband money. I loathed the fellow, and she knew it; and one day, when she had angered me terribly, I took a dreadful oath, that neither Frank Marriott nor any child of hers should ever have a penny of my money—and Caleb heard me.'

'I knew all this, Mr. Calcott.'

'You knew this, and yet you came to me. Do you

expect me to perjure myself for the sake of my precious niece?'

'I think such perjury would bring a blessing on your head.'

'You think so, eh?' regarding her with astonishment and perplexity. Strange to say, her independent answers and fearless bearing did not displease him; on the contrary, they seemed to allay his wrath. The white eyebrows twitched involuntarily as he watched her from under them. In spite of himself and his anger, he felt an inexplicable yearning towards this girl, who sat there in her shabby clothes and looked at him with such clear, honest eyes. Somehow the young presence seemed to lighten the desolate room, so long untrodden by any woman's foot. 'If she were any one but Frank Marriott's daughter—' but here the softer mood evaporated. 'Tut! what should you know of such things? There, you have said your lesson, and said it well. Go home, girl; go home.'

'Shall I go back to your niece, sir, and say to her that one

of her own flesh and blood has deserted her?'

'I have no niece, I tell you; I will not have a hated

relationship forced upon me.'

'Your name is Andrew Calcott, and therefore you are Emmie's uncle. Take care, for Heaven's sake; you cannot get rid of your responsibility in this way. If Emmie dies, her death will lie at your door.'

'I am sorry to ask a lady to withdraw, but I will hear no more.'

'One moment, and I will take your hint,' returned Queenie, rising and turning very pale. 'You are merciless, Mr. Calcott, but you shall not find me troublesome after this; though we were perishing of hunger, though Emmie were dying in my arms, I would not crave your bounty. You have received me coldly,' she continued with emotion, 'you have given me hard, sneering words, but I do not resent them; you are refusing to help me in my bitter strait; you are leaving me young and single-handed to fight in this cruel, cruel world; you have disowned your own niece, and are sending me back to her almost broken-hearted, but I will not reproach you; nay, if it would not make you angry, I could almost say, I am sorry for you.'

'Sorry for me! Is the girl mad?' but again the white eyebrows twitched uneasily.

'I am sorry for you,' repeated Queenie, in her clear young voice, 'because you are old and lonely; because you have only hard, miserable thoughts to keep you company; because when you are ill no one will comfort you, when you die no one will shed tears over your grave. It must be so dreadful,' continued the girl, 'not to want love, to be able to do without it. Don't be angry, Mr. Calcott, I am sorry for you; I am indeed.'

Not only the eyelids, but the rigid lines of the mouth twitched convulsively, but his only answer was to point to the door; but, as though irresistibly and painfully attracted by this spectacle of loveless old age, Queenie still lingered.

'Emmie never forgets you, sir. She does not love you; how can she? but she still says the prayer mamma taught her—"God bless poor Uncle Andrew." Now I have seen

you I shall ask her never to forget it.'

'Leave me,' was all his answer; and this time Queenie obeyed him. Had she remained she would have been frightened by the change that came over him. The veins of the forehead were swollen and purple now, the twitching of the mouth increased, a strange numbness seemed creeping over him. That night Mr. Calcott was alarmingly ill.

# CHAPTER VII

#### LOCKED IN

'The path my father's foot Had trod me out (which suddenly broke off And passed) alone I carried on, and set My child-heart 'gainst the thorny underwood To reach the grassy shelter of the trees. Ah, babe i' the wood, without a brother babe i My own self pity, like the red-breast bird, Flies back to cover all that past with leaves.'

AURORA LEIGH.

As the door of the inhospitable mansion closed behind Queenie she was conscious of a strange feeling of revulsion and weakness, a blank, hopeless depression of mind and body. At the first touch of the keen wintry air she shivered and staggered

slightly.

'All this has been too much for me; I wonder if I am ill,' she said to herself in a vague, wondering way; and then she remembered that she had eaten nothing since the early morning. Suspense and anxiety had deprived her of appetite, and she had sent away her dinner untasted. 'Whatever happens I must keep strong, for Emmie's sake,' she thought, and she went into a baker's shop and bought two buns; but as she broke one she remembered that Emmie's sickly appetite had turned that day from the untempting viands placed before her.

'Emmie will eat these, she is so fond of buns,' she thought, and she asked for a glass of water, which the woman gave civilly enough, telling her that she looked faint, and ought to rest for a little while; but Queenie thanked her and shook

her head.

For a little while she walked on aimlessly; she felt stunned and broken, and felt that she dared not face Emmie until she had recovered herself. She was too weak to walk far, but where could she go? she could not face Caleb's eager questioning, she thought, and yet his house was her only Service at the cathedral had long been over, the minor canon and some of the choir boys had brushed past her in the High Street, laughing and talking merrily; if she could only go and sit there for a little, until she felt stronger. Then she remembered, in a dazed sort of way, that she had heard that the workmen were doing some repairs in the nave. and were working late; it might be worth her while to find out if they had left one of the doors open. She felt a momentary sensation of pleasure at discovering this was the case. One or two of the men were still there, and the organist was practising some Christmas anthems. Queenie crept into one of the canon's carved stalls and listened. A light gleamed from the organ, but the altar and choir were in deep shadow. The men were laughing over their work; a beautiful tenor voice broke out with Gounod's 'Bethlehem,' the organ pealed and reverberated through the dim aisles.

Christmas time, 'peace and goodwill on earth, the angels' song,' sounding through all time. Alas! what peace in the sore, rancorous heart of the old man she had just left! Ought she not to feel pity for one whom the good angel of mercy had forsaken?

'The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.' Where had she heard those words? In church of course. Was Mr. Calcott wicked, or was he simply a soured, vindictive man, who considered himself ill-used by the world?

Her stepmother had loved him and had left him, and then had yearned after him with a bitterness of yearning that had shortened her life. Why had she accused herself, on her deathbed, of selfishness in leaving him? She had hinted indeed more than once of some great trouble that had warped his nature in early manhood; and yet what brother had a right to demand the sacrifice of a sister's whole life? Her stepmother had no morbid views of duty, but she had chidden herself for so leaving him.

There must be some mystery of which even Caleb was

ignorant. Caleb and his fellow-clerks spoke shudderingly of the fits of ungovernable rage to which Mr. Calcott was subject at times; and Queenie knew that for many years he had led the life of a recluse. People spoke of him as an eccentric person, a misanthrope, in fact; but he was not generally disliked, though his clerks and servants feared him. He gave largely in charities, and was always first in the subscription The firm of list in the town, and spoke much at vestries. Calcott and Calcott had always been respected in Carlisle, but of late he had withdrawn almost wholly from public life, and people said his health was failing. Queenie pondered over this problem till her head ached, and the organ changed melody and broke out into a sweet minor key; then a magnificent solemn prelude, sounding the keynote of every possible pain, an infinite march of woe tracing the footsteps of a Divine majestic life, and wrapping wonderful meanings and solemn hints in every chord—and Queenie knew she was listening to Handel's unrivalled overture to the 'Messiah.'

The sadder music pleased her better and made the tears flow, a luxury not often indulged in by the overtasked governess. After all, would she change places with the miserable man she had left? Her trials were great, no doubt, but she had youth and health and energy, and Emmie and Cathy loved her. By and by, when this dreadful winter was over and spring came, they would go down to Cathy's home, and Emmie would be a happy child for some weeks at least; they must live in hopes of that. After all there must be a meaning in the pain they had to bear; and then Queenie thought of a strange picture she had seen as a child, painted by a poor crazy artist living in their neighbourhood, at least her father had said he was crazy, though she and her stepmother had thought otherwise. It was called 'The March of Suffering,' and it was explained to Queenie that it was an allegorical picture of life. Her father had pished and pooh-poohed it as a dismal caricature, but her stepmother had shed tears over it, she remembered; one of the figures had attracted them both-a young girl with a sweet, resolute face, carrying a spiked cross in her bleeding hand, an old man before her had fallen down, and lay with his grey hair grovelling in the dust, and, still holding the torturing cross firmly with one hand, she had

stooped to raise him.

The face and figure lingered in Queenie's childish memory, and recurred to her mind as the solemn notes of the 'Messiah' reverberated through the cathedral. 'My cross has spikes too,' she thought; and then the workmen went out noisily shouldering their tools, and the young man with the tenor voice came clanking through the choir, and stared at poor pale Queenie as though she were a ghost, and the organ died away with a long plaintive wail.

Queenie followed them reluctantly; the buns were still in her pocket, but she had forgotten her faintness. As she stepped out into the dark narrow close she could see the windows of the Dean's house brightly illuminated, a few stars shone in the December sky, a cutting wind lurked round every corner, a faint vaporous moon shone over the

cathedral.

It was too cold to linger; even the dark, cheerless schoolroom, with its cindery fire and insufficient light, would be
better than the streets of Carlisle on such a night. Emmie
would be wondering, too, what had become of her, and be
picturing her all this time seated in Caleb's easy parlour: at
this thought she drew her thin cloak closer round her and
hurried on.

When she reached Granite Lodge she rang for some time without gaining admittance; this surprised her.

'It is very cold standing out here so long, Mary,' she said quietly, as the girl opened the door at last, and looked

at her with a scared face.

'I am so glad you have come, Miss,' she returned; 'Miss Clayton is in such a way, and all the young ladies. Fraulein has been going on awful, and mistress and Miss Tozer are out.'

'Emmie!' was Queenie's only thought as she hurried on to the schoolroom, but a flying footstep on the stairs arrested her, and Cathy rushed down to her looking pale and terrified.

'Oh, Queenie, where have you been? I expected you home hours ago; Fraulein has been going on in the most scandalous way, and Miss Titheridge is out, and I am so frightened about Emmie.'

'Where is she i what do you mean i' asked poor Queenie, her knees suddenly knocking together with weakness, and

her lips becoming dry all at once.

'Emmie had not been doing anything, only she was stupid and could not learn her lessons, you know her way, and Fraulein got into an awful rage, worse than I have ever seen her, and boxed Emmie's ears, so that the poor child was quite giddy; and when I spoke up and called her a cruel thing she sent Emmie up to her room, and locked her in, and put the key in her pocket; and though I have been going on at her like mad she will not give it up.'

'Locked her up in the dark!' almost screamed Queenie. Her own voice sounded quite awful to her; she was half-way up the stairs by this time, with Cathy panting behind

her.

'What could we do, Queenie? don't look like that. I have been sitting on the floor outside the door for hours, till I was almost starved with cold, talking to her.'

'She talked then!' pausing a moment on the garret stairs.

'Well, she cried a good deal, and I talked, but she has not answered lately,' stammered Cathy; 'perhaps she is asleep, she complained of feeling giddy and confused;' but Cathy, whose eyes were red with crying, did not add how passionately the child had beaten against the door and implored to be let out. 'She was so afraid of the darkness, and she wanted to hold some one's hand.' Neither did she add that just before Queenie's ring she had been frightened by a stifled groan, and then a sound as though something heavy had fallen; but her hesitation and evident terror were enough for Queenie, and in another moment she was kneeling outside the door.

'Emmie dear! Emmie, my darling! it is I—Queenie; there is nothing to fear—nothing; speak to me just one word, darling, to say you are not so very frightened, and then I will go down and get the key from Fraulein. Emmie, Emmie! do you hear?' shaking the door; but there was no answer.

'Stay there, Cathy,' whispered Queenie in a hoarse voice; 'I am going to Fraulein.' Her face was white with apprehension, but the look in her eyes scared Cathy.

The girls were huddled together and whispering in knots of twos and threes as she entered the schoolroom. There was evidently a mutiny, for Fraulein, with heated face and harsh voice, was vainly calling to order. A murmur of 'Shame! we will tell Miss Titheridge,' came to Queenie's ears, but she heeded nothing as she walked up to the table with outstretched hand.

'Give me that key, Fraulein!'

The woman looked at her with an expression at once stolid and immovable; the heavy Teutonic face was unusually lowering. Queenie had more than once suspected that Fraulein was addicted to a somewhat free use of stimulant; now as she looked at the inflamed, stupid face she was sure of it.

'Meess shall not dictate to me, I am mistress of this schoolroom to-night; the leetle Meess was naughty, unbearable; she must be punished.'

'Give me that key at once, or I will break open the door; give me that key, or you will rue it all your life,' continued Queenie sternly. The woman quailed for a moment under that bright indignant glance, and then she looked up with an expression of triumphant cunning.

'Do not fatigue yourself, Meess, the key is safe in my pocket; there it will remain until my dear friend, Meess

Titheridge, returns; ach nein Meess shall not have it.'

For a single instant Queenie measured the strong, powerful frame of the woman before her, then she turned from her without a word. 'Clarice Williams, Agatha Sinclair, stand by me and be witnesses that I am forced by sheer necessity to do this thing;' and with that she quitted the room.

Many of the girls would have followed, but Fraulein ordered them to their seats so savagely that they dared not rebel. As she went up the stairs the door-bell again sounded. Cathy rose with a look of relief on seeing her friend. 'Have you got the key, Queenie?'

'No,' returned Queenie doggedly. 'Stand back, Cathy;

I am going to break open the door.'

Either the young muscles were braced with new strength, or else the fastening of the door was crazy with age, but as

Queenie threw herself against it with all her force the woodwork round the lock splintered, and in another moment the door yielded.

'Now, Cathy, the light! Ah, merciful heavens! the savages!' as she threw herself down on the floor beside the white, senseless figure of the child and gathered it into her arms.

'She is not dead—she has only fainted, Queenie! Oh, Queenie, don't look like that!' cried poor Cathy, sobbing as though her heart would break over the pitiful spectacle. The elder sister's face was as white as the child's, her eyes were burning and dilated.

'If she is dead, Fraulein is her murderer. Out of the way, Cathy. They have gone too far; they shall hear me now; don't stop me—nothing on earth shall stop me from

speaking!'

'Queenie, Queenie, come back; are you mad?' but Cathy might as well have spoken to the wind; she could do nothing but follow, protesting at every step. As they crossed the hall they could hear Miss Titheridge's voice raised somewhat sharply in the schoolroom; she had returned, then. Queenie made no comment; she simply walked in and laid her unconscious burthen at the governess's feet.

'Miss Marriott, good heavens! what does this mean?'

and Miss Titheridge recoiled in absolute dismay.

'It means that Emmie is dead, and that Fraulein is her murderer!' returned Queenie in an awful voice. The poor

thing really believed it for a moment.

'No, no,' sobbed Cathy, sitting down on the floor and drawing the heavy head on to her lap; 'she is not dead, she is living, breathing; some of you help me to revive her; it is cold and fright and hunger that have made her faint. Oh, Miss Titheridge, don't mind poor Queenie, she is almost beside herself.'

'If she is not dead she is dying,' persisted the girl in a hoarse voice. 'No, don't touch her; don't dare to touch her!' as Miss Titheridge, with a sudden feeling of remorse, bent over the unconscious child and lifted the little cold hand. 'It is in your house this deed is done; ask Fraulein, who has shut her up in the dark for hours, pining with cold

and hunger, and in spite of all her cries to be released; ask

Cathy; ask Clarice; ask any of them.'

'Fraulein, is this true?' and Miss Titheridge looked absolutely shocked. She had treated the poor orphan with hardness and severity, but she was not a bad woman. A sudden revulsion of feeling came over her as she looked at the prostrate figure in Cathy's lap; 'Fraulein, is it true that you could have acted so barbarously?'

'It is true; and it is not the first time,' returned Queenie. 'If she die, Miss Titheridge, her death will lie at your door as well as Fraulein's; if she die, look to yourselves, for I will have justice, if there is justice in England. All Carlisle shall know how you have treated the child committed to your care. As to that woman,' pointing with her finger to Fraulein, who now looked on in stupid terror at this scene. 'she will live to rue this day if Emmie die.'

'Hush, hush, my dear Miss Marriott; be calm and reasonable, I entreat you.' Miss Titheridge had turned very pale; she was quite cowed by the girl's fierce despair. There was a wild, strange light in Queenie's eyes as she faced them, as she hurled words of righteous wrath at the shrinking women. 'My dear Miss Marriott, I am more grieved than I can say. I will do what you like. Send for a doctor; do what you please; only be calm.'

'Calm!' repeated Queenie in a voice of such utter heartbreak that tears positively came to Miss Titheridge's hard

eyes.

'Yes, send for a doctor; do something all of you,' implored Cathy; but as one or two of the girls stepped up timidly with proffers of assistance Queenie waved them fiercely away.

'No; you none of you loved her; you shall not touch her. Give her to me. Come with me, Cathy;' and as Cathy obeyed her wondering, Queenie led the way to Cathy's room, and laid her on Cathy's bed.

'Shut them all out; I will have no one but you,' she had said to her friend. When the doctor arrived he found the two girls trying vainly to restore animation to the child.

He shook his head very gravely when Cathy told him all, for Queenie never spoke again during that dreadful night.

'This is a sad case,' he said at last, after a careful examination. 'When she wakes up I fear she will not know you; brain fever is the least we can expect from such a shock. Acute terror on an exhausted system often leads to very sad results, especially with nervous children.' But though he spoke in a low tone, Queenie heard him.

## CHAPTER VIII

### DARK DAYS

'Cometh sunshine after rain;
After mourning joy again;
After heavy, bitter grief
Dawneth surely sweet relief!
And my soul, who from her height
Sunk to realms of woe and night,
Wingeth now to heaven her flight.'

Lyra Germanica.

EMMIE did not die, neither were her physician's worst fears verified; but for many a long week the frail existence hovered between life and death.

When the lethargy had passed a long season of delirium intervened, and every symptom of severe brain fever manifested itself. For weeks the little sufferer failed to recognise the loving faces that bent over her. Caleb Runciman spent most of his leisure hours beside the bedside, holding the hand of his little favourite, and gazing sorrowfully at the thin flushed face tossing so restlessly on the pillow.

Sometimes Molly, with her pleasant features and brisk homely ways, would come and watch through the long night, that Queenie might enjoy a few hours' repose. Caleb and his faithful Molly were the only visitors to the sickroom. Miss Titheridge had pleaded once, almost with tears, to be allowed to take some part in the nursing, but Queenie had sternly refused. 'Emmie shall see no one but those who love her,' was the invariable reply.

Granite Lodge was deserted now; Cathy and the other girls had long ago gone home for the Christmas holidays.

Cathy clung to her friends, crying bitterly, when the moment arrived for saying good-bye; but Queenie only looked at her with great weary eyes.

'I shall go home and tell Garth and Langley everything. They will be sure to ask you to come to us, after my London visit in May, to stay with us for a long, long time.'

'If Emmie be ever strong enough,' began Queenie; but somehow she could not finish her sentence. She suffered all Cathy's caresses passively, and then went back to her old place and laid her head on Emmie's pillow.

It seemed as though nothing could rouse her from the strange apathy that had crept over her after that terrible night. She heard almost without emotion that Fraulein had been dismissed; only, as the luggage was brought downstairs, and she heard Miss Titheridge's voice speaking in a subdued key in the corridor outside, she quietly left her place and opened the door.

Fraulein Heimer was at the head of the staircase in her travelling dress; she seemed petrified at the sight of Queenie. The girl walked up to her and laid her hand on her wrist. 'Come here, Fraulein, I want you a moment,' she said quietly; and, strange to say, the woman obeyed her without a word, and followed her to the threshold of the sickroom; but Queenie would not suffer her to enter. 'You can see your work from here,' she continued, in a suppressed voice. 'Ah! she is smiling at you; she does not know you tried to be her murderer.'

'You are cruel; you will have your revenge, or you would not have brought me here, Meess.' The woman's coarse, brutal nature was absolutely cowed by the spectacle of suffering innocence.

The child lay upon her pillow smiling idly, and waving her emaciated arms to and fro upon the quilt; the fair hair was closely shaven, the eyes dilated and brilliant.

'I have always longed for a cowslip ball; ask that lady to make me one, mamma; and strings and strings of daisy chains.'

'Why did you bring me here, Meess! I will not stay, I will not look! Ach das arme Engelein; ach gnädige Himmel.' The woman was trembling and all but hysterical.

Queenie's detaining hand dropped from her wrist; her revenge was satisfied.

'I wished you to know how we suffered. Sometime, if Emmie gets well, I shall try to bring myself to forgive you; but not till then. There go, she is calling to me; she always calls me mamma.'

It would not be too much to say that that sickroom became Queenie's world; she knew literally nothing of what passed outside it. Cathy wrote long letters to her, but she seldom answered them. One day she enclosed a note from Langley.

'My dear Miss Marriott,' it began, 'Cathy's glowing description of her friend makes us long to know you; and my brother and I trust that you and your dear little sister will be able to pay us a visit in the early summer. We know all your troubles, and wish that it were in our power to lighten them—' but here a restless movement from Emmie disturbed her, and she laid the letter aside.

Emmie's wanderings were rarely painful to the listener. A merciful oblivion had stamped out the memory of that terrible night; generally her talk was of the country. She imagined herself wandering in beautiful places with her mother and Queenie; gathering flowers, or else picking up shells and seaweed on the shore. Now and then there would be a troubled break—the waves were threatening to engulf her—or a serpent, or strange-headed beast lurked among the flowers; at such times she would grow restless, and it required all Queenie's efforts to tranquillise her, while the constant cry of 'Mamma, mamma,' was pitiful to hear from the lips of the motherless child.

'Mamma is here,' Queenie would answer with loving falsehood, laying the burning face on her breast; and something of the intense mother-love seemed really to pass into the girl's heart.

She was growing haggard and hollow-eyed under the strain of the long nursing. The doctor shook his head and remonstrated in vain, and Caleb's entreaties were equally unavailing. 'You will be ill, Miss Queenie; every one says so. You are up every night unless Molly is here, and barely snatch an hour's sleep in the twenty-four; you are overtaxing your strength, and a breakdown will be the consequence.'

'I shall not break down as long as Emmie wants me,' returned the girl bravely, but her lip trembled as though with weakness; she was becoming conscious that all this was becoming a terrible effort, that her strength would not hold out for ever. A sudden noise jarred upon her now; and once or twice, when her kind old friend was speaking to her, she had great trouble to refrain from bursting into tears.

Sometimes of an evening, when Caleb was there, she would wrap herself in a shawl, and walk up and down the stone hall and corridors to allay her restlessness; sometimes the door would open, and a red gleam shine out from Miss Titheridge's snug parlour, where she sat in cosy fireside circle with her friends. She looked up oddly and half-scared as Queenie's white face glimmered out of the darkness, but she never invited her to enter; the girl had repulsed her too decidedly for that.

The upstair corridor had a window at each end. Queenie was never weary of pacing this. Sometimes the moonlight flooded it, and she trod in a perfect pathway of light; once or twice she stood looking out on the snowy housetops, shining under the eerie light of stars.

It seemed months since she had sat in the curious carved stall in the cathedral, since she had heard the Christmas anthems and Gounod's 'Bethlehem'; months since she had stood beside the old man's chair, pleading for his own flesh and blood.

Caleb had spoken to her once or twice of Mr. Calcotts strange and alarming seizure. He had kept his room ever since, and was considered in a somewhat critical state, he Queenie heard him vaguely; but no suspicion as to the cause of his illness entered her mind.

The only thing that really roused her was when Emmie first feebly called her by her name. It was the night before the girls came back to school. Caleb had not yet paid his evening visit, and the sisters were alone.

'Is that you, Queenie?' Emmie had said. 'I thought it was mamma,' and Queenie had fallen on her knees, and murmured her thanksgiving with floods of grateful tears.

'I know Caleb too,' she had said later on, when the old

man came to her bedside; and something of the old quaint smile flitted over her face at the sight of her favourite. 'Have I been ill, Caleb? Queenie has been crying dreadfully,

and vet she says she is very happy.'

'Yes, my precious lamb, you have been ill; and Miss Queenie there has almost knocked herself up with nursing you; but now you are going to get well and strong,' laying down the little skeleton hand that could not raise itself. 'Hush, my pretty; hush, Miss Emmie, my dear,' as a large tear stole down the thin face; 'you must not fret now you are getting better.'

'I am so sorry for my Queen, my poor tired Queen,' sobbed the child; but she was soon hushed and comforted by assurances that Queenie was only a little tired and would

soon get rested.

Emmie slept for hours after this; and before many days were over a faint but steady progress was perceptible. Cathy indeed was shocked at her appearance, and wondered if anything so thin and unsubstantial could really be Emmie. Emmie smiled at her, but was too weak to speak more than a word or two.

One day, when she was well enough to be raised into a sitting posture and propped up with pillows, Caleb entered with a mysterious-looking basket, from whence proceeded a faint scratching sound; and this being opened, a small long-haired kitten, with innocent blue eyes and bushy tail, crept mewing into Emmie's arms.

The child's delight and astonishment at the sight of the long-coveted treasure were almost overpowering, and she

hugged the creature to her without speaking.

'Is it mine? is it really mine? will they let me keep it?'

she gasped at length.

'It is my belief that they would let you keep a whole menagerie, if Miss Queenie there chose to say she wished it,' returned Caleb with a sly glance at her; 'some folks are properly frightened.'

'Yes; Miss Titheridge will let you keep it,' replied her sister quietly; 'you need not be afraid; she is very kind

now, Emmie.'

'Oh yes, I know; when you are down at your lessons

she often comes and sits with me; she brought me that funny little man full of sweetmeats yesterday. I want to give some of them to Cathy.'

Queenie knew of these surreptitious visits, but she took no notice; it needed time to erase the memory of those years of neglect and cruelty. Emmie's sweet nature knew no

resentment; but with Queenie it was different.

She saw that Miss Titheridge was afraid of her. 'She has reason,' thought Queenie; 'she has injured me deeply. If the time ever comes to get rid of us both, she will do so gladly; but I do not mean to give her the chance; I am determined to find work elsewhere.'

As soon as Emmie could safely be left for an hour or two Queenie resumed her work in the schoolroom unasked; now and then she stole upstairs for a peep at the invalid. She sometimes found Emmie asleep with the kitten in her arms, or surrounded by the pictures and flowers which the girls lavished on her. She would look up, and say cheerily as Queenie entered, 'I am not a bit dull; Cathy and Clarice have been up, and just now Miss Titheridge brought me some jelly, and kittie and I have had such games,' and then Queenie would go down again with a lightened heart to her uncongenial task.

She often worked late into the night, that she might devote more time to Emmie. The child flagged and grew weary towards evening, and then Queenie never left her. Long after all the inmates of Granite Lodge had fallen into a refreshing sleep the young governess would trim the shaded lamp, and pore patiently over the pile of copy-books waiting for correction. Even when her head was on the pillow she could not always rest. The future lay dark before her; she must find other work; but where? that was the question.

Emmie was gaining strength day by day; but for months, perhaps years, she would require the greatest care. The doctor's orders were stringent. She must not open a book for months; the brain would not bear the slightest pressure; she must lead a child's unthinking life—eat, drink, and play, and, above all, sleep.

Emmie took very kindly to this régime. She spent most of her time in sleep; during the remainder of her waking

hours she would lie in languid content watching the antics of her kitten, or waiting for Queenie to come and talk to her.

Queenie made up her mind at last that she must speak to Miss Titheridge; and one evening she entered the little room where the governess sat casting up her accounts for the last month.

She looked up a little annoyed at the interruption; but her manner changed when she saw Queenie, and became as usual slightly embarrassed.

'Do you want me, Miss Marriott? is there anything

wrong with Emmie?'

'Nothing, thank you. I only wanted to speak to you about myself. I think it right that we should come to some sort of understanding about the future.'

'About the future?'

'Yes, Miss Titheridge,'—Queenie was the more self-possessed of the two,—'it seems to me that we cannot go on like this much longer. Emmie's illness has been a great expense and trouble; and, as far as I see, she will not cease to be a trouble for a long time to come, and we have no right to burthen you.'

'It is certainly very unfortunate,' began the governess.
'Dr. Prout is very kind about it; but still, as you say, it

is a sad inconvenience; one of my best rooms too.'

'As long as Emmie remains she cannot go back to her old one. Dr. Prout expressly forbids it; he says any renewal of the terror might be fatal.'

'Well, we must say no more about it then,' turning over

her papers nervously.

- 'Thank you. Believe me,' continued Queenie earnestly,
  'I do thank you for your kindness, tardy though it be to
  Emmie. I am only sorry that I cannot feel more grateful for
  it; but after what has happened there can be no question of
  gratitude between us.'
- 'I am sorry you are of so unforgiving a disposition, Miss Marriott.'
- 'I hope it is not that. I think it is that I have suffered too much to be able to forget; but what I meant to say was this: Emmie's weak health is only likely to be an inconvenience, and we have no right to burthen a stranger. I have

therefore reluctantly acceded to my old friend Mr. Runciman's request, to place Emmie with him, while I look out for fresh work. He has found me hard to persuade, continued the girl, smiling faintly as Caleb's arguments recurred to her; 'but circumstances have somewhat changed, and I do not fear now that this step will injure him.'

'And when do you intend to leave me?' inquired Miss Titheridge in an injured voice, for Queenie was too valuable a governess to replace easily. In her heart, though, she was secretly relieved at the course things were taking; as she would not have the onus of dismissing the orphans from her

roof.

'I shall be glad to remain until Easter,' replied Queenie quietly; and as Miss Titheridge only bowed her head and made no comment, she withdrew.

'I have done the deed, Cathy,' she said, coming into her friend's room, looking pale and exhausted; 'and now it is off

my mind. After Easter we shall be homeless.'

'Nonsense!' interrupted Cathy, rapturously embracing her; 'you will only be out of the dragon's clutches. You are coming to us for a long, long visit; and you shall not leave us until you have found another situation; and after that Emmie is going to that dear funny Mr. Runciman's.'

'Only for a little while; I shall not leave her long there. You see Mr. Calcott's illness has made a difference; they say he will never be well, and so he will not find out that Caleb is going to have Emmie; besides which, Caleb has promised

to take the money I gave Miss Titheridge.'

'So your pride is satisfied. I am glad of that, my dear Madam Dignity. Now let us go and sit with Emmie.'

## CHAPTER IX

### AN ERRAND OF MERCY

'Speak gently to the aged one;
Grieve not the careworn heart:
The sands of life are nearly run,
Let such in peace depart.'—Christian Lyrics.

CALEB RUNCIMAN had told Queenie that Mr. Calcott was seriously ill; but the girl had received the news with indifference, making no comments. 'What was his life—his useless, loveless life—in comparison with Emmie's?' she thought with bitterness.

Presently, when her trouble had lightened a little, and Emmie was slowly advancing towards convalescence, she remembered her hardness with some compunction; and her heart grew soft and pitiful over the thought of that lonely sickroom.

'I wonder if Mr. Calcott remembers my visit?' she said once to Caleb, but Caleb only shook his head in silence. He had not as yet been admitted to his employer's presence. The illness was enveloped in mystery, and all sorts of reports were current with respect to it.

Neither of them guessed the truth, or knew the strange thoughts and memories that haunted the sick man's pillow. The past was ever before him; conscience, so long dormant, had roused at last, and had laid hold of him with fierce and angry grip; he saw himself the victim of a hypochondria so fell and senseless that it had warped and scathed his better nature.

His past life was mapped out before him: a youth of disease and suffering, soothed only by a sister's love; a querulous, discontented manhood, darkened by fits of strange

melancholy; then years of loneliness and brooding.

Why had he failed with his life? Other men had suffered as well as he; other men had experienced the same passionate sorrows, had reaped disappointment where they had expected happiness, had battled with chronic disease, and yet had borne themselves bravely before the world! Why had he grown so hardened and exasperated against his kind that his very servants trembled in his presence?

What words were those that rung in his ear till the very air seemed to vibrate with them: 'I am sorry for you, because you are old and lonely; because you have only miserable thoughts to keep you company; because when you are ill no one will comfort you, when you die no one will

shed tears over your grave.'

Curses on that girl! How dared she stand and pity him to his face! him—Andrew Calcott—whom every one feared and respected—the man so outwardly prosperous that the world never guessed at the strange fiend that gnawed at his vitals!

'It must be so dreadful not to want love, to be able to do without it;' and again, 'Emmie never forgets you, sir. She does not love you; how can she! but she still says the prayer mamma taught her—"God bless poor Uncle Andrew." Ah! merciful heavens, would those words never leave him!

By and by the torment he suffered became unbearable; whole sentences of that conversation seemed stamped and burnt upon the brain. He would say them aloud sometimes, to the terror of those who watched him, and thought his mind was wandering.

'You are refusing to help me in my bitter strait; you are leaving me, young and single-handed, to fight in this cruel, cruel world; you have disowned your own niece, and are sending me back to her almost broken-hearted; but I will not reproach you; and then she had come closer to his chair, and had stood beside him, almost touching him with her hand.

He could see her clearly; the whole scene seemed photographed in his memory. Was he dreaming, or was she there really beside his bed?

He could recall every expression of her countenance, every trick of her speech. What a young creature she had looked in her shabby dress, sitting there before him. How eloquently she had spoken, and with what self-possession and dignity. Once or twice her voice had faltered, and the tears had gathered in her large brown eyes, as she pleaded for Emmie, but she had brushed them away hastily, and had

gone on speaking.

If he had ever had a daughter he would have liked her to have looked at him with those clear honest glances. The girl was absolutely without guile. Hard as he was, his heart had yearned over her, and yet he had driven her from his presence. Now and then a strange fancy, almost a longing, seized him, to hear her speak again, if it were only to tell him that she was sorry for him. He called himself a fool, and chid himself for his weakness; but, nevertheless, the longing was there and he knew it.

One evening, as Queenie was correcting some themes in the class-room, she was told Mr. Runciman wished to speak

to her.

Caleb's visits were rare now, but he sometimes came to bring a few snowdrops or violets to his favourite.

he was later than usual, and Emmie was asleep.

'I am not come to see Emmie to-night; it is you I want, Miss Queenie. You might have knocked me down with a feather when he gave me the message. But I suppose he is in his right mind?' continued Caleb, his blue eyes becoming very round and wide, and his rosy face a trifle paler than usual.

'A message from whom?' inquired Queenie, with some degree of curiosity. She was pleased to see her old friend;

any break in the monotony of her day was welcome.

'Ay, you'll never guess. Why, my dear young lady, when he told me to come and fetch you I was that flabbergastedif you know the meaning of such an outlandish word—that I could not tell whether I was standing on my head or my heels. "I want you to bring Frank Marriott's daughter," he says, in a queer off-hand way, and he shut his eyes and laid quite

'Do you mean Mr. Calcott has sent for me?' gasped

Queenie for the moment. She looked quite frightened.

'Ay, sure enough, though I never thought you would have guessed it so soon,' returned Caleb admiringly; 'but women's wits beat men's hollow. Well, I couldn't believe my ears, and no wonder; so I waited for him to open his eyes, and then I ventured to ask him to be so good as to repeat his speech, fearing I hadn't rightly understood him.'

"You have understood me very well, Runciman," he said in a quiet meaning sort of way, not quite pleased at my hesitation, you may be sure. It is "do this, or go there, and be sharp about it," with Mr. Calcott, always. "Please lose no time over your errand, but bring Frank Marriott's daughter back with you; I want to see if I can get to sleep to-night." That's all, on my word and honour, Miss Queenie.'

'It is very strange, but I suppose I must go; perhaps he has repented his unkindness, and wants to tell me so. a minute, Caleb, while I tell Miss Titheridge. Emmie is asleep, and so I shall not mind leaving for half an hour.'

'It is a wet night, I warn you; it is all of a piece with his usual selfishness sending for you on a night like this,' fretted Caleb, who was much perplexed and exercised in his mind by the whole proceeding; but Queenie met this additional trial with her usual cheerfulness, and struggled along bravely under her old umbrella.

This time they were not kept waiting. Gurnel eyed them quite as morosely, but he ushered Caleb at once into a comfortable-looking dining-room with a blazing fire, and wine and biscuits on the table; while he begged Queenie civilly to follow him, which she did, secretly admiring the carved balustrades and soft rich carpets as she did so.

'My master is up, but he cannot leave his room,' explained the servant, as he ushered Queenie into a large handsomelyfurnished bedroom, where Mr. Calcott lay on a couch beside the fire, in his Indian cachmire dressing-gown, with an eiderdown quilt over him. A respectable-looking woman sat working at a little round table beside him. At Queenie's entrance she curtsied and withdrew.

Queenie quietly took her place.

'You have sent for me,' she said softly. 'I am sorry to hear you have been so ill. It is a wet night, but I could not help coming,' she continued, trying to speak naturally, but she could not; the change in the sick man appalled her. She understood, as she looked at him, that he was slowly but surely dying.

'They tell me I have some months still before me; that's bad hearing for those who wait upon me, as I am likely to trouble them for some time,' with a touch of his old grimness. 'Well, girl, so you have come through the wet and dark, just

to gratify a sick man's whim?'

I would do more than that to oblige you, sir,' returned Queenie, with genuine compassion in her voice. The wan suffering face, the wasted hand, stirred a world of pity in her soul. Lonely, unloved, and dying—resentment faded out of her memory at a spectacle so pathetic, so truly pitiful.

'What! do more than be sorry for me?'—with sardonic humour in his voice. 'You would give more than a drop of water to poor Dives in torment? Do you remember, girl,

that you dared to pity me before?'

'My pity will not harm you, sir.'

'Eh, why not?'

'Now you are so very ill, it may even do you good to remember that we feel no bitterness towards you, that we forgive all the wrong done to us. Why do you look towards that door? do you want anything?'

'That woman has forgotten my medicine,' he muttered, 'and I have the strange sinking again. Hirelings are not

worth the price of the bread they eat.'

'Let me give it you,' returned Queenie, rising, and mixing the draught; but he shook his head. 'You must call her; I cannot raise myself, and the least movement gives me pain.'

'She has gone downstairs; let me try what I can do. You must not wait, indeed, Mr. Calcott; your lips are turning blue and livid. I am used to nursing; I could lift mamma, and I have carried Emmie about so much lately.' As she spoke Queenie skilfully raised the invalid and put the glass to his lips.

'If thine enemy hunger, feed him; and if he thirst, give

him drink.' Why did these words come into the sick man's mind as he felt the support of the strong young arm, and

drank the reviving draught from her hand?

'There, you are better now,' went on Queenie cheerfully, putting the pillow comfortably under his head. Mr. Calcott looked at her strangely, and then he was silent for a long time.

'You are poor,' he began at last.

'Yes, we are very poor; you remember I told you so.'

'Ah, true! I forgot all that. You are used to nursing too. Mrs. Morton is a very capable person, but I should like some one who would read to me and amuse me. I—' hesitating slightly—'I would pay you handsomely if you would come to me.'

Queenie turned pale, and her eyes filled with tears. 'Come to you at once?'

'To be sure. Do you think a dying man can talk about the future? I would make it worth your while,' he continued, as though anticipating some objection. 'You shall ask your own sum; I will buy your services at your own price.'

'Hush! please don't talk so, you are only paining me; it is impossible. What? now! come at once! I could not

leave Emmie.'

'What folly!' he interrupted harshly. 'Have you not told me that you are fighting single-handed against the world; that Emmie, as you call her, is next door to starving? Were these falsehoods? were you imposing on my credulity that you refuse real tangible help when it comes?'

'I only refuse what is impossible for me to accept,' returned Queenie in a choking voice. 'Ah, you cannot understand, you do not know, that since that terrible night I have nearly lost Emmie.' And then she told him, as well as emotion

would allow her, of all she had been through.

'Humph! that's why you have grown thin and unsubstantial-looking. I thought there was some change in you. You ought to get heavy damages from those women; but the child is getting well, you say?'

'Yes; but she is not strong, and requires the greatest care. No one could watch over her as I do; I understand lier; I know her every look; I see directly she is weary or overdone.

It will be months before I can safely leave her, even with Mr. Runciman and Molly.'

'I should think the atmosphere of that precious school could not be conducive to the welfare of a nervous invalid,'

interrupted Mr. Calcott irritably.

'We shall not be there much longer,' returned Queenie quietly. 'At Easter we are going to Mr. Runciman's for a little visit; and as soon as the warm weather comes I'm going to take Emmie into the country to get strong.'

'Indeed I did not know you could afford such luxuries,'

with biting sarcasm.

Queenie coloured, but she went on steadily-

'Neither can we. We are indebted to the kindness of a school friend, who has offered to take us home. I have barely money for our railway journey there and back; but we shall manage somehow.'

Mr. Calcott glanced at the girl's shabby dress and cloak, then at the brave face, and somehow his sarcasm vanished.

'I suppose you are too proud to take a five-pound note?' somewhat brusquely.

Queenie hesitated, and then her face grew crimson.

'Speak out; you are too proud, eh?'

'I would not take it for myself, but for Emmie's sake I should be thankful.'

'I know nothing about Emmie,' with a frown. 'If you take it it is for yourself, mind; the child is nothing to me; I cannot and will not recognise her.'

'If I take it, it will be to buy her comforts,' replied Queenie

scrupulously.

'Spend it how you will, it is nothing to me,' was the irritable answer. 'I have made you a good offer to-night. By the sacrifice of a few months you could earn enough to maintain both the child and yourself for more than a year to come, and you choose to refuse the offer. I can say no more.'

'I dare not accept it. If anything were to happen to Emmie, I should never forgive myself. Mamma always told me that we must never leave a certain duty for an uncertain

one; and Emmie is my duty.'

'Pshaw! female sophistry. The child would do well enough; children always do.'

## QUEENIE'S WHIM

Queenie shook her head.

'It goes to my heart to refuse you. If I were free I would come and serve you, not only for the sake of the money, but because mamma loved you so dearly.'

'There, there; I can bear no more,' returned the invalid

impatiently.

Queenie took the hint and rose.

'I am sorry if I have tired you. May I come again?'

'Yes; come again to-morrow at the same time. Tell Runciman that he is to bring the business letters here in the morning instead of Smiler. Please ring the bell for Mrs. Morton, and be careful to close the door very carefully, as the least noise jars on me. What are you waiting for now, child?'

'I only thought I should like to shake hands with you, sir.'

'There, good-night,' was the brusque response; but the hand was cold and shaking, as the warm girlish one closed round it.

'Good-night, and thank you for Emmie,' returned Queenie

brightly.

Caleb sat up and rubbed his eyes drowsily as the girl entered. 'How long you have been, Miss Queenie, dear!

What has he been saying to you?'

'Hush! I will tell you as we go along. He is very ill—dying, Caleb, and it is very, very sad to see him. Look what he has given me,' opening her hand and showing the crisp bank-note; 'I think he meant it as a sort of return for bringing me out in the wet, but of course I shall not keep it; it is all for Emmie.'

Queenie's visits to Mr. Calcott became almost a daily recurrence. It soon became a rule for Caleb to fetch her when lessons were over and Emmie was asleep, to sit with the invalid an hour before he retired to rest. Miss Titheridge had probably received some private hint from Caleb, for she made no objection to these frequent absences; but, on the contrary, encouraged them by gracious inquiries after Mr. Calcott's health when she encountered Queenie.

The girl soon grew used to these visits. Mr. Calcott, it is true, never varied in his manner. He still received her brusquely, and his remarks were as pungent and sarcastic as ever. with a strange bitterness that often brought tears to her

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eyes; but still, in a vague, uncertain sort of way, she felt he liked to have her there beside him. Once or twice she fancied his eyes had brightened at her approach, even while he scolded her querulously for being late. He accepted her services reluctantly, and often found fault with her for feminine awkwardness. Her efforts never gave him pleasure. No word of commendation crossed his lips, no thanks for the unselfishness that brought her out evening after evening, after a hard day's work, to minister to a discontented old man; and yet Queenie felt rewarded if his eyes turned wistfully to the door as she entered, or a sigh of relief betrayed that his loneliness was at an end.

'Master has been that restless that Morton can do nothing to please him,' Gurnel informed her once when she was unusually late. Queenie smiled and quickened her steps; she knew what she had to expect.

'I suppose you have got tired of your good work,' was the only welcome she received; but Queenie had learned how to parry such remarks without rousing the old man's jealous temper. She turned the subject laughingly, by telling him of the purchases she had made out of the money he had given her.

'What! all those things out of five pounds!' he grunted incredulously; 'frock, jacket, and hat, and I don't know what beside. I thought I said the money was for yourself.'

'Emmie is so delighted with everything,' she went on.
'The pleasure brought a tinge of colour to her face; it would have done you good to have seen her.'

'Humph! I daresay there will be much good done to me to-night, after being kept an hour waiting for other folk's pleasure.'

'Work must be done, you know,' returned Queenie lightly. 'The term is nearly over, and then I shall be more at leisure.'

'Indeed, is the grand visit to be given up?'—sarcastically; but there was suppressed eagerness in his voice.

'Oh, there is a whole month before that; we need not talk of that yet. Now let me read to you;' but though the book was an interesting one, and Queenie read in her best manner, Mr. Calcott's thoughts seemed wandering.

When the last day of the term arrived the sisters left

Granite Lodge. Emmie, who had been in a state of pleasurable excitement all the morning, grew a little tearful and silent

towards the close of the day.

Queenie, who was overwhelmed with business, and had scarcely time to bid her friend good-bye, and to add a few affectionate words at parting, suddenly missed Emmie in her usual corner. She had searched the house without success, and was becoming terribly frightened, when a maid informed her that she had seen Emmie toiling up the garret stairs with the kitten in her arms.

The little girl was curled up in her usual place, gazing dreamily out of the window, when Queenie entered. The little face looked small and white under the cap-border; the soft yellow down peeping out here and there gave her an infantile appearance.

'Dear Emmie, why have you come here?' began her sister reprovingly; but Emmie held up her finger and stopped her.

'Hush! of course we ought to say good-bye to the poor old place; don't you know prisoners sometimes kiss the walls of their cell, though they are really not sorry to leave it. We have had nice times here, Queen, though we have been so very unhappy. As I sat here before you came up, I felt as though there must be two Emmies; I feel so different to the old one that used to hide her face and cry when it got dark.'

'Then we will not stay and make ourselves miserable in this gloomy place,' interrupted Queenie anxiously. 'Caleb will be here directly, and we must go and say good-bye to Miss Titheridge. Come, Em, come,' and Emmie obeyed reluctantly.

Miss Titheridge looked embarrassed and nervous, and Queenie purposely shortened their leavetaking. When Emmie's turn came she held up her face to be kissed.

'Good-bye,' she said, looking at the governess with her large serious blue eyes. 'Thank you for being kind to me at last. I am so sorry you could not love me; but I daresay it was my fault;' and as Miss Titheridge bent over her something beside a kiss was left on the child's thin cheek.

Caleb's little house seemed a perfect haven of refuge that night. Queenie felt almost too happy as she arranged their

effects in the little dark room that Caleb had set apart for his guests. It seemed wrong of her to be so light-hearted while the future was so uncertain.

Emmie lay in the big brown bed, with ugly drab curtains edged with green, and watched her as she moved about actively, singing over her work. The room had a side window looking over a stone-mason's yard; the white monuments gleamed in the red evening light; a laburnum shook long sprays of gold against the panes; Molly's linnet sung against the wall; Caleb in his old coat walked contentedly up and down the narrow garden path between his currant bushes; some children were playing among the slabs and ledges of stone. How humble it was, and yet how peaceful; a quiet waiting-place until the new work came ready to her hand. One evening, as she was sitting sewing at the open window, Caleb beckoned her mysteriously to join him in his favourite walk between the currant bushes.

'My dear,' he began, his eyes becoming round as usual, and betraying a tendency to hesitate slightly between his words, 'I want your advice, your assistance, indeed. I have —hem—I may say—I have a delicate and peculiar commission on hand,—hem,—and I—in short, a lady's advice would be most suitable, and, I may say, satisfactory. Molly is a good creature,' he continued, after a pause, 'an admirable creature, of course; but in this her advice is of such a nature that I must own I should hesitate to adopt it. She is fond of bright colours, you see; and as long as there is plenty of red and green in a pattern she would find no fault.'

'Do you want me to choose a new dress for Molly?

suppose that is what you mean.'

'Molly! oh dear, no! nothing of the kind, Miss Queenie dear. The fact is, a young friend of mine, is—hem—is, in short, going to be married, that is, she is going to be married some day, no doubt.'

'Indeed! a friend of yours, do you say!' Caleb nodded

still more mysteriously.

'The circumstances are peculiar; yes, I am certainly right in saying they are peculiar,' continued Caleb, reflecting; 'but she—that is, he—has commissioned me to get her some things suitable to a lady in such a position, as the same peculiar circumstances prevent her from choosing the articles herself. She is not going to be married yet,' rubbing his head with a little vexed perplexity; 'but she is going on a visit to his friends, and he—the young man, I mean, ah! that's it,' with a chuckle, as though he had discovered a way out of some difficulty—'he, the young man, my dear, has proper pride, and wants her to make a favourable impression on his relations; do you see, Miss Queenie.'

'Is she so very poor?' returned Queenie innocently, and not at all suspecting the veracity of Caleb's garbled-up

tale.

'Poor! well I may say that she is poor—extremely so,' with a burst of candour; 'but a lady,—dear, dear,—as much

a lady as yourself, Miss Queenie.'

'I should have thought her lover could have chosen some pretty things for her himself,' observed Queenie, a little incredulously, at this juncture. 'He must be a poor sort of lover,' she thought, 'to devolve such an interesting duty on her old friend.'

Caleb coughed, and stopped to inspect a promising gooseberry bush; and then he discovered his pipe was out, and must replenish it; it was quite five minutes, too, before it would draw properly, and Queenie got impatient for her question to be answered.

'Why cannot he get them himself?' she inquired, a little

scornfully; 'he need not have troubled you.'

'Well, you see, a man with a broken leg is not particularly active, and shopping does not suit the complaint,' was the oracular answer, as Caleb puffed volumes of smoke bravely. 'No, no, that sort of thing is not good for the complaint,' continued the old man, with another chuckle; 'so you see, Miss Queenie dear, if you don't help me a bit with your advice I shall have to go to Molly after all, and shall come back with a plaid satin, or something that wouldn't suit the pretty creature at all. Come, now,'—coaxingly,—'what should you think she would like best?'

Queenie wrinkled her white forehead reflectively,—poor and pretty, and with a lover laid up at a distance. This began to get interesting; she must do her best to help this unknown girl.

'Well, if I were judging for myself,' she returned at last, 'I should think a nice useful black silk——'

'Ah! that is just it,' interrupted Caleb enthusiastically. 'I ought to have thought of that; of course, a black silk.'

'And,' continued Queenie, now thoroughly absorbed in a mental review of this ideal wardrobe, 'a pretty spring suit,—brown, I think, if it would suit her,—and a brown hat with a pheasant wing. I think she would look nice in that.'

'Brown, of course; the idea of my never thinking of brown,' repeated Caleb, clapping his hands, 'the very colour of all others that would suit her. Go on, Miss Queenie dear.'

'Well, I suppose her lover does not wish to be extravagant—it is not her trousseau, you see; some nice linen collars and cuffs, and perhaps handkerchiefs, and some brown gloves—and, oh! she must have a box to put them in. If she be so very poor, you see, it will not do for her to dress too handsomely,' observed the young girl sententiously.

Caleb dashed down his pipe, and very nearly executed a pas de seul on the garden path; his blue eyes danced with

glee.

'There now, there now; did I not say you had a wise head, Miss Queenie! The very thing of all others! a box!—and Molly and I would never have thought of it—a really good handsome box that would make the luggage porters

stare, ch?' inquiring.

'Well no; a nice black leather one, like Cathy's, I think,' returned Queenie, with quiet relish. During the remainder of the evening, as she sat over some plain sewing she was doing for Emmie, she thought of Caleb's friend a little enviously, and wondered how she would like the nice things. She wished Caleb would tell her a little more about her; but, to her surprise, he did not recur again to the subject.

About a fortnight after this conversation, as she returned from her usual evening visit to Mr. Calcott, she paused for a moment at the door of her room, transfixed in surprise.

A large leathern trunk blocked up the room; two white letters, Q. M., stared her full in the face; a sudden revelation of the truth drove the flush to her very brow.

Could it really be? She lifted the lid gingerly, almost trembling with excitement; her hand came in contact with

the folds of a black silk; lower down lay the brown dress and jacket; the little hat with its pheasant plume nestled snugly in one division. Queenie had just a hurried peep at piles of snowy handkerchiefs, and collars, and cuffs, at French gloves, and soft streaks of colour in the shape of silken scarfs, and then she rushed breathlessly down into the parlour. where Emmie was reading fairy tales to Caleb.

Emmie put down her book and clapped her hands at the sight of Queenie's face. Caleb's eyes twinkled over his pipe,

but he said nothing.

'Oh, Queen, isn't it lovely? better even than Cinderella's pumpkin coach. Isn't it a dear, dear secret, for Caleb and me to have kept all this time?'

'Do you think the young man with the broken leg will be satisfied with my taste?' chuckled the old man. Queenie put her arms round his neck, her face was rosy with pleasure.

'Oh, Caleb, is it for me! really for me! the box with all those beautiful things? Did you buy it for me, dear, because you knew I was so poor and shabby, and you did not like me to go among those strange people with my old clothes? Oh, Caleb, how could you, how could you, and you so poor yourself?' caressing him gratefully.

'Miss Queenie dear,' confessed the old man, with tears in his eyes, 'if I had the money I would not begrudge you satin and diamonds; nothing would be too good for you, my pretty; nothing that old Caleb would not get you; but it is not me, bless your dear heart, that you have to thank for all your

things.'

Queenie's face fell, her arms dropped to her side.

'Not you, Caleb?'

'Why, no,' he returned, slightly embarrassed; 'I would have bought them and gladly if I had had the money, which I am free to confess is not the case: You have another and a richer friend at court than old Caleb.'

'Do you mean to tell me,' replied Queenie, sitting down,

quite pale with the surprise, 'that—that——'
'Ah, I knew you would guess it!' interrupted Caleb sagaciously. "Find out what she requires for her visit, and get it, Runciman," he said to me; and, as I observed once before on a similar occasion, you might have knocked me

over with a feather. "Ask some woman to help you, for we neither of us know much of a girl's farthingales and furbelows, I fancy," he said, grimly enough; and so, my dear, I made bold, and invented that pleasing little fiction in order to get at some of your ideas.'

'Mr. Calcott has given me all those things?' she repeated; and then for the moment she could say no more.

## CHAPTER X

# 'THE LITTLE COMFORTER'

'Thy love
Shall chant itself its own beatitudes,
After its own life wailing. A child kiss,
Set on thy sighing lipe, shall make thee glad;
A poor man, served by thee, shall make thee rich;
A rich man, helped by thee, shall make thee strong.
Thou shalt be served thyself by every sense
Of service which thou renderest.'—E. B. BROWNING.

On her next visit, which was to be her last before they started for Hepshaw, Mr. Calcott received Queenie with more than his usual acrimony.

'In my time punctuality used to be considered a virtue,' he said severely, with an ominous glance at the timepiece, which showed Queenie she was some minutes late. 'Never mind; I daresay this is the last time you will have to amuse a troublesome old man.'

Queenie's eyes filled with tears.

'Please don't talk so, Mr. Calcott; not to-night, at least, when I have to bid you good-bye for so many weeks.'

'Aye, you will be very sorry for that, no doubt,' ironically.

'Yes,' she returned, with the sweet candour natural to her; 'far more sorry than I would have expected or believed.'

He laughed a low, bitter laugh, that went to the girl's heart.

'And you think I shall credit that?'

'Why not? one must always believe the truth,' she returned simply. 'When I first came here I pitied you dread-

fully, and yet I was half afraid of you. I do not fear you at all now.'

'Indeed!'

'Your moroseness used to terrify, but now I do not seem to mind all your hard words; they lurk under kind actions, and so they have lost their sting. It was kindness that prompted you to send me all those pretty things.'

'Humph, I see the reason for all this civility now.'

Queenie's eyes rested tenderly on the worn, cadaverous face.

'You see I am longing to thank you, and yet I hardly know how to do so without giving you offence.'

'I hate thanks,' gruffly. 'There, girl, that will do; let us get to our reading,' and Queenie, who saw that unusual suffering lay at the bottom of the old man's bitter humour, did not venture to thwart him just then.

When the time came for her to go she put the marker in the book carefully, and leant over him. As she touched him softly with her hand, he started and opened his eyes; they had a strange, almost a wild look in them for a moment.

'I could have sworn it was Emily's hand,' he muttered. 'Hers was always soft and warm, like the breast of a little bird. Pshaw! what rubbish I am talking; you have read me to sleep, child; I have been dreaming.'

'Let me give you your draught, and talk to you a little;

to-morrow I am going away, you know.'

'Aye, to-morrow, and a good many to-morrows.' She still held the cold, nerveless fingers in hers, and her voice was very

gentle in his ear.

'I shall not like to think you are missing me; when evening comes I shall wish I were here beside you, reading to you and lulling your pain. It seems to me,' continued the girl, speaking still more softly, 'as though in some strange way, and out of strange circumstances, we have grown to be friends.'

He sighed, and turned restlessly on his pillow, but there was no repulse.

'You have been very good to me, and I shall love to remember your goodness. I think mamma was right when she said you had a good heart. To-morrow I am going away—as you

know—for a long, long time, and I want you to do me a favour.'

'Pshaw! I will do nothing blindfold,' with a return of his old harshness; but, under the half-closed eyelids, how he

watched it—the bright speaking face!

'I want you to see Emmie. Hush! do not refuse,' as he gave utterance to an expression of impatience, almost disgust; 'do not send me away less happy; do not refuse such a trifling request. If I have ever pleased you, if I have ever wiled away an hour of bitter pain, grant me this one favour: let the child stand here for a moment beside you.'

'Can you not leave a dying man in peace?' he began savagely, but his wrath faded before the girl's mild glance. A brief spasm as of pain contracted his forehead, and his

eyes closed.

'Have your foolish whim,' he muttered at last, almost inaudibly. 'But what have I to do with children? I always hated them.'

'You will not hate Emmie,' returned Queenie, as she hurriedly rose; 'it is a fine evening, and she pleaded for me to bring her; "she wanted to see poor Uncle Andrew," she said.'

'Tell her not to call me that,' he exclaimed angrily; but

Queenie had already closed the door behind her.

Another minute, and the child stood beside his couch. The evening sun shone full upon her; she had grown tall and thin from her long illness; the beautiful fair hair had been shaved off, but the soft yellow down peeped under the pretty cap border; the great blue eyes had a solemn, unchildlike look in them; a little wasted hand crept into the sick man's, and then patted it softly.

'Humph! so you are better, aye, after nearly frightening that sister of yours to death,' with a milder growl than

Queenie expected.

'I am much better, thank you, Uncle Andrew,' returned Emmie gravely; and then, perfectly undaunted by the grim, deathlike face on the pillow before her, she clambered up on the bed beside it, and sat perched before him like a large soft-eyed bird. 'Queenie thought I was going to die, and cried dreadfully every night;

Cathy told me so. Are you going to die, Uncle Andrew?'

'It seems so,' with a chord of ineffable bitterness rasping the thin voice.

Emmie leaned forward and stroked his face pityingly, with an old-fashioned womanliness that touched her sister greatly.

'I am so sorry; it seems such a pity, just as we were going to be fond of you; it will be so strange, too, missing you out of my prayers every night, not that it will do any harm to go on saying, "God bless you," even after you are dead,' continued Emmie reflectively, and in a slightly puzzled tone. 'I asked Queenie about that, and she said she was not sure.'

In spite of his iron nerve Mr. Calcott winced slightly. This mere babe was playing round the feet of the King of Terror, while he was quailing secretly at the thought of the skeleton hand raised ready to strike; it would find him in his darkness and loneliness; his truest friend would come to him in the guise of an enemy. He was not a weak man, but at this moment the thought of his solitary deathbed caused him to thrill with premonitory pain and anguish. And then, with an odd transition of idea, he remembered how one night, when he was a lad, he had been wakened from his sleep by an awful storm; and his little sister Emily had come crying to his bedside, and had clung to him in an agony of terror. He remembered, as though it were yesterday, the little shivering figure in white, the tangled fair hair under the cap border, the childish voice broken with sobs, 'Oh, Andrew, dear Andrew, take care of me: I am so frightened.'

'You are only a girl, Emmie; boys and men are never frightened; why, I don't know what fear is,' he had returned half scoffingly, and yet proud to shield her, and to feel himself strong in his boy's strength.

Ah, he knew what fear meant now. He thought, with the cold clammy sweat of superstitious terror, of what the coffin lid would cover; while a child's lips blessed him—him, Andrew Calcott, dead, unloved, and unremembered—blessed him in her prayers.

God pardon his wasted, misused life, he groaned, and grant him one single fragment of opportunity more, and he should not be unremembered; and the flicker of a strange

smile curved Andrew Calcott's lips as he silently registered this vow.

'Are you sleepy or tired, Uncle Andrew?' asked Emmie, rather awe-stricken by the long silence and closed eyelids, and still more by the smile. 'When you lay like that, so still and white,' continued the child, 'you reminded me of the figure of the old Crusader—a knight I think he was—on the tomb I saw once in church. Do you know what I was thinking about when I watched you?'

He shook his head.

'I was wondering if you felt afraid-to die, I mean.'

'Well, child; what then?' regarding her strangely.

'I used to be terribly afraid, you know,' creeping closer, and whispering confidentially. 'When I sat alone in the old garret,—ah, the poor old garret; I don't hate it quite so much now,—and it got dark, and the silence had odd voices in it, I used to think about mamma and want to go to her; only I could not get to her without dying, and that troubled me.'

'Hush, Emmie,' interrupted her sister softly; but Mr. Calcott waved her aside, and bade her let the child speak, and Queenie drew back again into the shade of the curtain.

'I used to sit for ever so long, and fancy how it would be. I fainted once; and then I thought it would be like that, only I was afraid I should feel terribly cold and lonely when I woke and found myself alone in a strange place, however beautiful it might be; and then Queenie took me to see that picture, and after that I did not mind at all.'

'What picture, little one?'

'Of a girl, not much older than I, asleep with her arms so,—crossing hers gravely over her breast,—'and sliding up a great pathway of light, just as I saw a little boat once floating in the moonlight. Fancy floating asleep between the stars, and right into heaven!'

A half-groan answered the child, but she was too absorbed to notice it.

'I never forgot the picture; it made me so happy to think of it. I shall not mind dying a bit now; I shall just cross my arms, as the girl did, and shut my eyes, and when I wake up I shall see mamma smiling at the door; and perhaps,' finished the child solemnly, 'He will come to me, instead of letting me go very far in the great dazzling place to find Him.'

'Him!'

'Our Lord, you know; I shall want to see Him most. Uncle Andrew, when I say my prayers to-night I shall tell Him that you are afraid, and ask Him to let mamma be the first to meet you; and not a great splendid angel with wings, but just mamma, looking, oh, so beautiful! and smiling as she used to smile.'

'God bless you, child; there, leave me; take her away, or I will not answer for myself. I have the pain again; those drops, quick! Oh, merciful heavens! only the boon of another day, one more day.'

'Hush! you are only agitating yourself; you are not really worse,' returned Queenie tenderly, wiping the moisture from his forehead. 'If you calm yourself the attack will pass off. Emmie, darling, you must leave him now; he is too tired to talk any more;' and the child gently obeyed, after kissing him timidly on the cheek.

'You must go too, I suppose,' laying a delaying hand on her dress nevertheless.

'Yes; but it is only good-bye for a little while,' returned Queenie, trying to speak cheerfully, but her eyes filling with tears. 'When I come back we must have some more nice talks, and quiet cosy times together. You will miss me; I am sorry and grieved to think how you will miss me,' finished the girl, faltering sadly over her words; 'but Emmie and I will think of you and talk of you all the time we are away.'

'Aye, do; but it is good-bye for all that,' he returned, with a strange look at her. You have meant well by me, I believe; thank you for all you have done for me.'

'No, no; it has been so little, and it has made me happy to do it,' exclaimed Queenie, and now the tears fairly brimmed over. As he held her hand in the weak, nerveless grasp of old age she stooped over him, with an infinite yearning of pity and sorrow, and kissed him softly on the forehead, as a daughter might have done.

In the years to come Queenie never regretted that kiss.

### CHAPTER XI

#### CHURCH-STILE HOUSE

'If we were to form an image of dignity in a man, we should give him wisdom and valour, as being essential to the character of manhood. In the like manner, if you describe a right woman in a laudable sense, she should have gentle softness, tender fear, and all those parts of life which distinguish her from the other sex; with some subordination to it, but such an infirmity that makes her still more lovely.'—Sir RICHARD STERLE.

It was with somewhat mixed feelings that Queenie bade farewell to her old friend Caleb Runciman the next day; and even Emmie looked back regretfully at the little dark house.

'I shall never love any other quite so well; shall you, Queen? I cannot bear big houses and large halls. We shall miss Caleb and Molly dreadfully; but then we shall only be a month away.'

'Ah! but a month is a long time; a great deal may happen in it,' returned her sister thoughtfully, a little awe mingled with her pleasure. They were going to a strange place, amidst unknown faces; they would make new friends, feel fresh interests, think new thoughts.

They, two, were standing hand in hand on the threshold of a new world—a world full of all manner of delightful possibilities; they had broken with the dreary past, and now the future lay before them. Queenie took off her pretty brown hat and bared her forehead to the breeze with a little gasp. 'How nice it is to feel young and strong and free. You and I are free, Emmie; yes, free as this delicious wind,' finished the young girl with a little quiver of ecstasy in her voice.

A thousand vague imaginations flitted across her mind as she sat watching the flying milestones, while Emmie, wearied out with excitement, slept with her head upon Queenie's shoulder. 'I feel afraid of nothing to-day; I am sure I shall find work; I do not mind how humble or hard it is. I think I feel young for the first time. After all, there are only two things to fear in life—debt and unkindness. A few loving words will sweeten even a crust of bread and a cup of water. Emmie and I will not mind a little hardship if we can only be together; but how nearly I lost my treasure,' with an involuntary shudder that roused Emmie. She sat up and rubbed her eyes.

'I think this must be Hepshaw, we are going more slowly; what a little journey, Queen! Oh yes; there is Cathy on the platform, looking into all the carriages. She does not see us: what fun!'

'Indeed she does, Emmie; she is laughing and nodding at us. Let me help you out, dear;' but almost before she descended from the carriage she felt herself seized by a pair of arms, and Cathy's bright face confronted her.

'Oh, you dear things! to think you have really arrived! I have been here at least an hour and a half, till the station-master thought I must have taken leave of my senses. I would have it the train was due at three. Give me a kiss, Emmie. Bless me! how that child grows. My dear Queen,' eyeing her with intense curiosity and satisfaction, 'if you are not ashamed of walking with me in my old hat I think we will move on, as they say in London.'

'Certainly, if you will lead the way,' returned Queenie politely; but her friend remained still in the same attitude of delighted astonishment.

'My dear, when I have recovered a little; but what will Langley say? I feel I am bringing you to the house under false pretences; the victim of misfortune appears suddenly in the garb of an elegant female, with a golden pheasant's plume in her hat. You lovely old Queen! you look so nice that I quite long to hug you. Ted will be fairly overpowered when he sees us.'

'Cathy, really you must not talk such nonsense,' returned Queenie, blushing; 'the man is waiting for our tickets, and Emmie is tired.'

'Ah! now I recognise Madam Dignity, of Granite Lodge. Come along, then, through this little gate. We have to wait at the Deer-hound inn for a few minutes till Ted and the waggonette come up from Warstdale; that is where Garth's granite quarry is. Garth is so sorry that he could not meet you himself.'

Queenie did not answer; she felt a little shy and silent all of a sudden. She followed Cathy down the steep little road bordered with plane-trees, and cumbered with piles of neatly-hewn planks, to the grey old inn. What a quiet country corner it looked, she thought. The village, or market town as it really was, lay beyond; a long road went stretching away into the distance; across the road were granaries, and a sunny little garden; a hen with a family of yellow ducklings were scratching in the dust; dark clumps of plane-trees were everywhere. The grey old landlord stood regarding them from the porch; the comely hostess came bustling out to meet them.

'Come in, Miss Clayton; the waggonette isn't here yet, and it is a bit hot in the sun. Mr. Logan passed just now on his way to the quarry, and he would have it his big.

umbrella did not shelter him at all.'

'It is sure to be full of holes,' returned Cathy carelessly, as she led the way into the inn. Queenie had a glimpse as she passed of a long, low-ceiled room with cross-beams and a deep window, and then of the great stone kitchen with its long settle and wide open fireplace. As they followed the landlady up the broad staircase Emmie clapped her hands delightedly.

'What a beautiful room! I never saw a glass cupboard of china before like that; and there are two tables and rocking-chairs; and, oh dear! what a hard, slippery sofa, and what a funny, cracked piano; and, I do declare, there are at least four or five large silver teapots, and a great stand of

wax flowers.'

'This is where they have the agricultural dinners and do all the speechifying. Sit down, Queenie, do; how I wish that long laddie of ours would drive up; but it is just like Ted, to be late for everything.'

'I do not mind waiting,' returned her friend quietly. She was quite as much excited as Cathy and Emmie, though she did not show it as they did. She stood looking out of the small-paned window, through the screen of red geraniums, at the sunny little garden across the road.

Two buxom lasses were carrying piles of white, freshly-dried linen to the inn; the patient hen was still clucking devotedly at the heels of her foster-family; some long-necked geese waddled aimlessly across the road; a sweet odour of fresh hay came from the granary in front; the trampling of hoofs and the loud cool swishes of water, mingled with the hissing of a red-headed ostler, sounded from the stable-yard. Queenie looked out dreamily, until the noise of advancing wheels broke on her ear.

Cathy started up.

'There is Ted! look at him brandishing his whip and making up for lost time by driving furiously. What a shame to treat poor old Minnie so! she is quite covered with foam. Ted, you tiresome fellow, what do you mean by keeping my friends waiting?'

'I beg your friends' pardon; am I late? Nonsense, Cath, you are such a one to exaggerate; come, jump in. Where's the luggage? Give a hand, you fellows there, and stow in the traps; the mare's fidgety, and won't stand.'

'No wonder, when you have fretted her to a fever; you would catch it from Garth if he saw her. Now then, Ted, where are your manners? this is Miss Marriott and her little sister Emmie.'

The young man took off his straw hat rather gravely, and then descended leisurely from the vehicle, and commenced stroking the mare's neck, casting furtive glances at the newcomers as he did so.

He was a mere boy, as Cathy had described him, barely twenty; his sister's name of the 'long laddie' suited him perfectly, for he was certainly the tallest specimen of youthful manhood that Queenie had ever seen; his slenderness added to his height, he towered above them like a boy giant.

Queenie liked his face; it was good-looking, though somewhat freckled, with a pair of mild brown eyes; at the present it manifested nothing but an expression of obstinate good-humour.

'Now, then, Cathy, jump in; the mare won't stand, I tell you.'

'I don't see why we are to hurry ourselves,' replied his sister provokingly. 'Did you meet Mr. Logan on the Warstdale road, Ted?'

Ted laughed.

'Poor old Christopher? yes; there he was, trudging away, with his blue spotted handkerchief tucked under his felt hat, and the sun scorching him through the rents in his umbrella,

and his boots white with dust, such a figure of fun.

'You ought to have insisted on bringing him back; he will have a sunstroke. Think of Miss Cosie's feeling,' and Cathy looked a little grave. 'You are such a child, Ted; you never think of anything. Now drive slowly through the town, that I may point out the various landmarks to Miss Marriott.'

Ted followed his instructions au pied de la lettre, by proceeding at a funeral pace, while Minnie snorted indignantly at her driver's tight hand, and whisked her tail angrily at the flies.

'Oh! do go on a little faster, Ted; every one will be staring at us if we go at this ridiculous pace,' pleaded his sister, trying hard to be dignified and not to laugh. These passages in arms between her and her younger brother were not new in the household. Queenie was amused to see that he merely pushed his hand through his rough light hair and jogged on at the same pace.

Queenie had plenty of time to note the surroundings, though she persisted then, and long afterwards, in regarding Hepshaw as a village, in spite of its dignity as a market town. She admired the gamekeeper's white house, set so prettily among the sycamores or plane-trees, and the picturesque police-station, with its cottage porch and bright-bordered flower-garden.

The long broad road, with its stone cottages set so snugly in patches of garden ground, and the line of dark blue hills in the distance, pleased her greatly; everything looked so fresh and still. By and by they came to the market-place, with its few bright-looking shops, and the boys' schoolhouse; just opposite was a curious little building with small half-moon windows, that Queenie took for the market, but which proved to be the girls' school.

'I think it was used for the market once upon a time,' explained Cathy: 'is it not a queer little place! those high crescent-shaped windows are so absurd. Look behind you. Queen; that is the prettiest peep of all,' as she pointed to some green meadows, behind which were the church, vicarage, and another house, standing high above the town, and perfectly embosomed with trees.

The road now branched into two; farther on were some still more picturesque cottages, and even a villa or two, but the mare was now jogging up a steep country road, and in another moment they were driving across a tiny most and into a courtyard, bordered with a row of dark sycamores, with a side glimpse of a small grey house adjoining the churchyard.

'Welcome to Church-Stile House. Isn't it a gloomy old place? and yet Langley and I love it. Oh! there is Langley,' as a lady-like woman, taller and more erect even than Cathy, came swiftly down the garden path towards them.

'How late you all are; I have been expecting you for an hour at least. I am so glad you have come, Miss Marriott; Cathy is never weary of talking about her friends. So this is really Emmie!' kissing the child and holding out a cordial hand to Queenie.

The voice was sweet and pleasant, the accent singularly refined; nevertheless, the first sight of Langley Clayton gave Queenie a curious shock. The likeness between the sisters was striking, but it was a likeness that pained rather than pleased; it was Cathy's face grown prematurely old, and deprived of colour and animation, a face that had sharpened and grown weary under the pressure of some trouble; the eyes were gentle, but unrestful; the long wave of hair worn over the forehead in Cathy's style was mixed with grey. The touch of the thin sensitive hand lingered long on Queenie's palm.

'I am so glad, so very glad, you have come,' repeated Langley, with a soft flickering smile. This flickering smile was peculiar to Langley; it was all that ever broke up the subdued gravity of manner habitual to her. Queenie soon discovered that she never laughed; when pleased or excited this odd uncertain smile would play tremulously round her mouth for a moment and then fade away.

'It is so good of you to have us,' returned Queenie, feeling strangely subdued all of a sudden, as she followed Langley's tall figure into the square little hall, and then into a sitting room, pleasantly littered with books and work, and with a certain old-fashioned cosiness in its arrangements. The deep basket-work chairs, lined with chintz cushions, looked deliciously inviting, and so did the low couch and readingtable. One high narrow window commanded a view of the steep little lawn, running down to the lane; the other, as Queenie expected, opened full on the churchyard. Within a few feet were tall palings, and a granite obelisk; then some sparsely scattered tombstones, and a long terrace bordered by sycamores, and known by the name of the plane-tree walk.

'I am afraid it strikes you as very dismal,' said Langley softly, as they stood together at the windows; 'most people consider the obelisk a great eyesore. A few years ago there was not a single tombstone; it is only now that they have begun to use the churchyard. It was just the church, and the green, and the plane-tree walk; it was our garden then.'

'I suppose one would get used to it in time,' replied Queenie, somewhat evasively. Her healthy young vitality shivered a little at the incongruity between the warm cosiness of the life inside and the gleaming tombstones without, within a few feet of the fireside round which the family circle gathered. 'That terrace walk is very pretty, and the old church must be nice; but——'

'But you think we ought always to be reading Hervey's Meditations, and considering our latter end,' broke in Cathy gaily. 'Nothing of the kind, I assure you; Garth grumbles and declares he will build a new house for himself higher up the hill, and Ted agrees with him; but I don't mind it in the least, and Langley likes it.'

'Do you?' asked Queenie, fixing her large brown eyes curiously on Langley's pale face.

'I love it,' was the quiet answer.

'Well, what do you think of Langley?' asked Cathy, when they had been duly installed in their large comfortable room. Miss Clayton had left them, taking Emmie with her, after having ministered to the child with her own hands. Her thoughtfulness for their comfort, and her gentle

manipulation of Emmie touched Queenie's heart; they had gone off together hand in hand, Emmie chattering confidentially to her new friend, and Cathy and she had ensconced themselves cosily on the low window-seat commanding a view of the old church and churchyard. Queenie liked it better now; after all it was strangely peaceful, God's Acre, as she loved to hear it called.

'Well, what do you think of this sister of mine?' repeated her friend inquiringly.

'It is too soon to ask my opinion; I have not made up my mind. Indeed I like her,' as Cathy looked a little crestfallen; 'I should not wonder if I like her better the more I know her; her voice is delicious, so low and musical, with a little trill in it, and her eyes looked so kindly at one.'

'You are a model of reserve and prudence, my dear Madam Dignity. I always make up my mind the first minute whether I like a person or not, and never swerve an inch from my like or dislike afterwards; that is feminine instinct, as I tell Garth. He is as tiresome as you are; one can never get at his opinion of a person till he has thoroughly sifted and weighed them in a sort of moral balance of his own.'

'I must say I think that he is wise.'

'He has strong prejudices though; small sins are sometimes heinous in his eyes. Garth's pride is his chief fault; he is quite absurd on some points. I have heard him say, more than once, that he would never marry a rich woman, however much he cared for her; that a man should never be beholden to his wife for anything but love. Isn't that absurd?'

'It is a fault on the right side.'

'Nonsense; I am tired of arguing the point with him. What has money to do in the case? My husband might be as rich as Croesus, or as poor as a church-mouse, but if I liked him I would stick to him all the same. It is wrong pride in a man to let anything stand in the way if he likes a woman; and Langley agrees with me.'

'Does she?'

'Yes; she talks on these sort of subjects so nicely; she is not a bit hard, as Garth is sometimes. He hates flirting and

nonsense, and scolds me dreadfully if I make myself too amiable to any masculine individual; but Langley always takes my part, and says I am only a child; oh, she is a darling, or a saint, as Mr. Logan says.'

'I am sure she is nice,' returned Queenie, throwing a little enthusiasm into her voice. Cathy's frankness was embarrassing. That first evening she would have found it impossible to form any true opinion of Miss Clayton; she was attracted and yet repelled by her, fascinated oddly by her voice and manner, and yet pained by a weariness and suppression for which there seemed no words. Was she unhappy or only tired? was her life simply too monotonous for her? had she wider yearnings that stretched out further, and were still unsatisfied? had responsibility and overmuch thought for others traced those worn lines, and wrinkled the smooth forehead? Queenie found herself indulging in all manner of conjectures before the evening was over. That she was a woman infinitely loved and respected was plainly evident. Langley's opinion, Langley's sympathy, were always claimed, and never in vain; the same patient attention, the same ready help, were given to all. She talked largely and well, and with a certain originality that made her an interesting companion; and there was a breadth and large-mindedness about her views that appealed strongly to Queenie's admiration.

'I do like her; I am sure I shall like her,' she repeated for the third time, when Cathy had finished a long and animated harangue on her sister's merits. Cathy never stinted her praise; she spread it richly for those she loved, with a warmth of girlish hyperbole, and a generous glazing-over of manifest defects, that was rather refreshing in this censorious age.

'What was I saying? Hush! there is Garth; we must go down now,' as a sudden melodious whistle sounded from below, at once deftly and sweetly answered by Cathy. 'That means tea is ready, and his highness is hungry; come, we must not keep th' maister waiting.'

The long low-ceiled dining-room looked snug and homelike as they entered. A tempting meal was spread for the travellers: a basket of roses and ferns garnished the table; some canaries sang in the window. Ted Clayton's long figure lounged in a rocking-chair; Emmie was standing beside him, looking like a little Puritan girl in her grey frock and close-bordered cap, making friends with a white Maltese terrier; a tall young man in a rough tweed coat leant over the back of his chair.

'Miss Marriott, this is my brother Garth,' said Cathy, with an accent of pride in her voice, and Garth came forward with a pleasant smile.

What a good, thoughtful face it was; certainly Cathy had not exaggerated. He was a handsome, a very handsome man; the chin was strongly moulded, and the mouth closed firmly, perhaps a trifle too firmly, under the dark moustache, but the blue-grey eyes had an honest kindly gleam in them; the strong brown hand grasped Queenie's with open-hearted friendliness.

Then and afterwards Queenie told herself, that Garth Clayton's face came to her as a sudden revelation—with the instinctive recognition—of God's noblest handiwork,—a really good man, good, that is, as poor human nature reads the word.

By and by, when she knew him better, and all his faults were mapped out legibly before her, and she read him with the unerring light of a woman's truest instinct, she ever gave him honour as one who strove to walk nobly amongst his fellows, who stood as a Saul among men, a head and shoulders taller than they, by reason of the integrity and strength of purpose that lay within him.

'Keep innocency, and take heed to the thing that is right, and that shall bring a man peace at the last,' were the words of the wise old King, to which Garth Clayton had ever given heed, keeping his hands clean with a whiteness that scorned to sully itself; standing aloof from small petty subterfuge and conventional untruths.

And yet there were strange blemishes in Garth Clayton's nature apparent to those who loved him. There was the narrowness of a pride that chose superiority rather than equality; that would stand aloof willingly from his equals, to rule, and rule wisely, over his inferiors; a born autocrat; despotic, yet not unkindly; somewhat tyrannical, unable to

brook contradiction, childishly eager for praise, sensitive to a fault, jealous of dignity, and, by one of those strange subtilties that baffle metaphysicians, ever through life painfully conscious of hidden disadvantages. For the clear intellect failed in depth and breadth, the calm common sense read itself truly; and, too proud to stoop to others for knowledge, or to own ignorance, which it would have been truly great to confess, Garth Clayton would at times wrap himself round in a silent reserve that often mystified and perplexed others.

But there was always one who understood him, and that was Langley; and by and by there came another!

## CHAPTER XII

#### MISS COSIE

'Well, to be sure, there never was a little woman so full of hope and tenderness, and love and anxiety, as this little woman was.'—DIGKENS.

THE next hour passed pleasantly enough; the Claytons devoted themselves to their guests' entertainment with an openheartedness and simple hospitality that seemed natural to them.

In spite of the seclusion in which they lived, and the loneliness of their surroundings, they showed a perfection of breeding and a breadth of idea that surprised and delighted Queenie.

Her shyness and brief reserve soon vanished under the influence of their kindness. After the first few minutes she ceased to feel as though she were a stranger amongst them, and found herself entering into their plans and wishes as though she had known them for years.

'You see Cathy has talked to me about you all, and that is why I feel that I know you,' she said, a little apologetically, lifting those strange eyes of hers to Garth. The young man flushed a little, but answered her kindly. Cathy's friend was rather formidable to him; he had at least never met any one in the least like Queenie Marriott; he felt far more at home with Emmie.

Nevertheless, he hid his embarrassment in his usual manner, as though half ashamed of it, by holding his head higher than usual, and laying down the law to his sisters in his dictatorial, good-humoured way. Before tea was over

Cathy was coaxing him to give them a picnic in the granite quarries, and he had hummed and hesitated a good deal over her request, 'just to make himself of importance,' whispered the wicked little sister to Queenie.

This led to some conversation about the quarry and quarrymen; and here Garth found himself on his own ground, and talked much and well. He told Queenie, as they all strolled down the lane in the twilight, after Emmie had gone to bed, about his plans for the men's welfare and improvement, 'his boys,' as he termed them.

There seemed no limits to the good he did amongst them. Queenie felt her respect for him increase as she listened. He had given up one of his fields for cricket, and was himself their captain. He had instituted a reading-room; and Mr. Logan and he had formed a useful library. Here in the winter there were lectures given to the men by the Vicar, and Captain Fawcett, a neighbour of theirs, who lived in one of the villas lower down the village; or he himself read to them amusing passages from Dickens and Charles Lever. Garth's reading was none of the finest, as Queenie discovered for herself afterwards, and his singing was even worse in quality; but he would carry it through in a certain sturdy fashion of his own, that was somewhat amusing to the home critics.

Then he had schools for the children; and on alternate Sunday afternoons Mr. Logan held service in the schoolroom for those unable to come over to Hepshaw Church. More than this was not possible at present; but, as he modestly informed his auditor, his sister and he had done their best to organise a Sunday school, and to hold a weekly Bible class for those who chose to attend.

'Langley is great among the women,' he observed with a bright smile; 'she half lives in the cottages. I wish I were half as successful with my boys.'

Queenie had yet to learn the value that Garth Clayton set on his boys, and how the best and highest part of his life was lived among them.

It was too dark to go down the village, as Queenie found they all called it; so Langley proposed they should go in by and by and have some music. All the Claytons were musical except Garth, though Garth would have been the last to own his deficiency in this respect, and always held his own manfully in the family concerts, in spite of Cathy's sometimes insisting on stopping her ears with cotton-wool, and Ted's muttered observation, that he never knew that rooks cawed so loudly at night.

But Garth, generally so sensitive to criticism, cared nothing for these home witticisms. He loved to air his lungs freely. He would burst into 'Simon the Cellarer,' or 'The Vicar of Bray,' or, better still, the often-abused 'Village Blacksmith,' with an honest disregard of all soft inflection or minor chords that was painfully ludicrous. Ted and Cathy would throw themselves back in their chairs and laugh noise-lessly while the performance went on, and even Langley would bite her lip as her thin flexible fingers moved over the keys, the sounds she evoked almost swallowed up in that mighty bass.

I think, after all, though they laughed they loved to hear it, and would better have spared many a sweeter and choicer thing out of their home daily life. Garth never used half-measures. As Cathy once drily said, 'He does everything thoroughly, even to making a noise, or singing, my dear,—I believe he calls it by that name.'

His laugh, too, was quite a surprise to Queenie when she heard it first; true, it was rather boyishly loud, but its delicious abandon of mirth was thoroughly infectious; none but Langley could ever hear it without joining in it. He would throw his head back, tossing back the wave of dark hair as he did so, and the strong, even, white teeth would shine under the moustache; while the pealing ha-ha would provoke corresponding mirth.

'It does one good to hear Garth Clayton laugh,' Mr. Logan said once. 'Only a man with a good conscience could laugh like that.'

Queenie sat in her low basket-work chair, watching the looks and ways of this happy home-circle, too thoroughly interested and amused to dream of fatigue, though they had excused her singing that night on that score.

'I play very little; but I am supposed to sing tolerably well, that is, most people like my voice,' she had said, quite frankly, in answer to their polite inquiries.

'She sings like an angel,' was Cathy's verdict on this; 'her voice is as fresh and clear and true as a lark's, but her tingers move over the keys a little like drum-sticks. I have often told you so, Queen; you put all your expression in your voice.'

'I shall sak Miss Clayton to play my accompaniments,' was Queenie's graceful answer. She was not a bit annoyed at her friend's plain speaking; she liked to be told of her faults, and always set herself earnestly to mend them.

The practised sedulously after this evening, and gleaned all

manner of hints from Langley.

'You must teach your fingers to speak; they make acquaintance too stiffly with the keys,' Langley said once to her. 'You play so correctly, too; it is such a pity you do

not make us feel your music.'

'My life has been all drudgery, you see,' Queenie answered humbly; 'there has been so little music in it, all the harmony got jarred out of it somehow. It has only been grinding at hard tasks, rubbing out sums for little girls, and putting them in again; one could not learn to play tunes happily after that.'

'But you sing, and so sweetly too.'

'Ah, one learns that at church; singing is part of one's religion,' went on the girl reverently. 'Nothing, however sordid and hard, can keep religion out of one's life; it is just there always. Slaves sing, you know, and blind chaffinches, and poor miners underground over their work. It keeps off bad thoughts. Oh, every one must sing,' she finished with a smile, feeling that now for the first time in her young toilworn life she was really resting on her oars.

Only resting for a brief space though; by and by she must take them up again, and row on bravely, against the stream perhaps, through marshes of sedgy weeds, fighting against a sullen current, perhaps drifted into deeper waters, but always with the broad blue sky above her, with tints of silver-lined clouds and possible sunshine, with hopes of safe

harbourage by and by.

'I help myself, and therefore God will help me,' Queenie had often said to herself in her sorely-tried youth. 'I am afraid of nothing but doing wrong, and seeing Emmie suffer; the rest I can bear;' and this belief in herself saved them both.

'I am going to take you to see all our celebrities,' announced Cathy solemnly at the breakfast table the next morning. 'It is Langley's district day, and she will have nothing to say to any of us until lunch time. I propose that we leave Emmie with Deborah to shell peas, while we do Hepshaw thoroughly.'

'You must take me into the church first,' observed Queenie, quite prepared for a long morning of delicious idleness, and in the true holiday spirit, alert and ready for any chance enjoyment. 'I think there is something delightful in making acquaintance with a fresh place; even seeing fresh faces and hearing different voices gives me an odd indescribable sort of pleasure.'

'You poor prisoner, yes,' returned her friend sympathisingly, as they walked down the little garden path at the side of the house, and passed through the gate that opened on the churchyard, with its long terrace planted picturesquely with sycamores. 'You are like a nun; you have only peeped at the world through a sort of invisible grating in Miss Titheridge's front parlour. You must make up for lost time, and live every moment thoroughly, as Garth and I do.'

'That is just it; we do not half live our lives, we girls,' replied Queenie dreamily; 'half of us seem asleep; our faculties lie dormant, and get rusted just for want of use. Miss Titheridge hung round my neck like a millstone; she literally crushed and pulverised all the best parts of me. It is being born again; it is a sort of moral regeneration, this feeling of freedom, this—oh, how can I make you understand it all, Cathy!'

'Seeing is believing,' was the brusque answer. 'You are a different creature, my dear Madam Dignity; you were like the frond of my favourite prickly shield fern that I was watching yesterday. You were all there, you know, the greenness and the freshness; but one could not get at you, you were so tightly swathed and coiled up.'

'Yes,' returned Queenie joyously; 'and now I have found myself, my own individuality. I do think, seriously, that I have a larger capacity for living than other people. I have good health, that is one thing; my constitution is perfect; then I love work, I really and literally do, Cathy. Work braces one, it brings all one's faculties into play; work is

rest; inaction, idleness; pleasure for the sake of pleasure, is simply paralysis of one's higher life, it is premature old age.'

'I wish I felt as you do,' was the half-envious answer; there is nothing little about you, Queenie, Garth said so last

night.'

'Did he? you should not have told me that, Cath.'

'Why not, pray? I just asked him how he liked you; I wanted to get at his opinion, you see, and he answered, just as gravely as though he were my Mentor, that he thought I had chosen my friend wisely, that you seemed a thoroughly

healthy-minded girl.'

'I think we will go into the church now,' interrupted Queenie somewhat irrelevantly. There was a little flush of pleasure in her cheek. She was glad he had said that; it was just the sort of praise she most coveted. She wanted Cathy's people to think well of her; if the truth must be known, she hungered for their appreciation as a half-starved child might have done. Crumbs would not satisfy her; condescension or kindness would not feed her thoroughly; she must have their full commendation, their equal friend-ship. She had known them so long, she had seen them all so perfectly with her inner vision, that she could not feel as a stranger amongst them.

'I am so at home with them already,' she had said to her friend the previous night. 'There are no hard beginnings; we are friends to start with; there is no thawing, because there is no ice,' she had said, with a certain vague enthusiasm, which, nevertheless, had been perfectly understood by Cathy. 'One has so much hard uphill work with most people,' she had continued, talking out her thoughts half to herself. 'Don't you know exactly how commonplace people make acquaintance, how laboriously they try to find out one's tastes! They do it about as gracefully as though they were breaking stones on the highway, or hammering flints as boys do to elicit sparks, and all the time looking as though they knew you had nothing in you worth coming to light. is terribly fatiguing. I once heard a very clever man liken modern society to the mummy-room of the British Museum. He said, "Human beings were so swathed and bound up in

conventionality that there was no getting at the real thing at all."

'I like Langley's way of knowing people,' Cathy had answered; 'she just knows them at once, takes it for granted, I mean, that all that interests her interests them. We had such an argument about it one day, when I would have it that she had bored some one about the soup-kitchen. "I was so full of it myself that I knew that I should not talk so well on any other subject," was her sole apology. And then she told me I was quite wrong, "that people, after all, liked to be treated as reasonable beings, and not like children pleased with sugar-plums. 'Give, and it shall be given unto you,' was just as true in social intercourse as it was in the sense first intended. If you sow tares you will reap tares, child; always remember that," she finished. "I prefer scattering precious grain. You have no idea how often one reaps a rich harvest. It is the real thing, you see, and people like that."

Queenie and Cathy were largely given to conversations such as these. It was just talking out their thoughts, as They aired all manner of quaint subjects in they called it. this way, these two honest-hearted girls. Both were a little vague at times; most women are. Cathy always amused her friend mightily. She had a habit at certain times, in her 'goody moods,' as she termed them, of taking herself to pieces to examine her moral mechanism, just as though she were examining the works of a new watch, as Queenie would tell her, clogging the wheels and stopping progress all the time. 'If you are always taking yourself up by the roots to see how you grow you won't grow at all,' she assured her in her droll way. 'You ought not always to be looking at your defects and blemishes in the glass. People freckle from the sun sometimes: but I don't believe overmuch sunshine hurts any Keep tight hold of the reins, never let go, and then try and forget everything but the road you are travelling. Forget nothing but yourself; mamma always said that.'

There was something very fresh and sweet in this girlish intercourse, devoid as it was of vanity and selfishness; they were tolerably equal in capacity; neither could teach the other much, but they could learn together. It was as though they were two young gleaners following the reapers: now

one gathered a stray sheaf and tossed it into the lap of the other; everything—an idea, a thought—was just a golden ear to be winnowed into grain. At times their content would

have filled a granary.

Happy season of youth! when everything is delightful because everything is new; when harvests are more bountiful; when the mildew and the blight and the cankerworm are unknown; when the sky and earth meet and touch softly; when beautiful thoughts steal like strange birds in the twilight; when the glimmer of a star will provoke a reverie; when a hand-clasp will wake a world of dreams; when the whole universe is not too big a setting for one small beating heart; when one believes in one's guardian angel, and heaven is so near—so near.

It is not always so. Alas! alas! for the anointed eyes purged from their youthful blindness, made wise with the serpent-knowledge of evil and good. Tread softly here, ye worldlings, with lifted sandals and bated breath; for here, as in all real lovely things fresh from the Maker's hand, is indeed holy ground.

Queenie was moderate in her praises of Hepshaw Church; nevertheless, it pleased her with a certain sense of fitness. There was no beauty of architecture, no tastefulness of detail; it was just a village church, adapted to the needs of a rustic

population.

But there was something pleasing in its simplicity. Through the open door the fresh sweet winds blew straight from heaven; the shadows of the sycamores swept without the porch; some leaves rustled on the threshold. Queenie walked down the narrow aisle, turning over the well-worn books on the desks. A smile crossed her face when she saw the font; the mean little stone stoup struck her as incongruous. 'It seems a pity to see that,' she said very simply, 'I can almost cover it with the palm of my hand; it ought to be so wide and massive, filled to the brim with purifying and regenerating water, lavishly given and lavishly bestowed, not doled in drops.'

'Hush! here comes Mr. Miles,' answered Cathy; 'he is the boys' schoolmaster. We have no schoolmistress, you know; the old one is married and is going away with her husband. He has come to practise on the organ; he is organist, choirmaster, and I don't know what besides.'

'Is he nice?' whispered Queenie. She just caught sight of the pale, serious-looking young man, dressed in shabby black like a Methodist parson of the old school, who came

limping up the aisle on one crutch.

Hum! truth lies sometimes at the bottom of a deep well,' was Cathy's ambiguous reply. 'Yes, Garth says he is nice; he pities him. Somehow I can't make him out; I don't know why, but I always think of Eugene Aram, or the school-master in the Mutual Friend when I see him. I am sure he has got a history. I don't like a young man with a history; from a child I never could bear riddles. Ted is quite fond of him, though. I believe half my dislike comes from his persisting in dressing like a broken-down undertaker; he only wants a white tie to make him complete.' They were happily in the lane by this time, and Queenie could enjoy her laugh without scruple of conscience.

'Is this the Vicarage, Cathy? but of course it is; I knew it from your description. You are a perfect word-painter;

all your portraits are true to life.'

'That means caricature.'

'Well, I suppose so; but, all the same, your likenesses are

thoroughly spirited.'

'Only I never miss out the moles and the freckles. This is not the ideal vicarage, is it, ma chère? though I could show you one not many miles from here. Crossgill Vicarage is lovely; I must take you to see it some day, as nurse used to say; it is the dearest, most picturesque place. A little river flows through the village just in the middle of the road; and the church is beautiful; and the vicarage a quaint old house with gable ends embosomed in creepers, with the loveliest garden always blazing with flowers.'

'That sounds nice.'

'When we drive over there we have tea in the hall; it is wainscoted with oak, and there is a lattice window, and an old oak staircase and gallery, all tiny, but so quaint, and the old nurse, nearly eighty, waits upon us; I do love the place so.'

'This is bare prose after that,' returned Queenie, as they walked up the steep narrow garden, between rows of cabbages

and bushes of pale pink and white roses. All sorts of homely old-fashioned flowers bloomed amongst the beans and peas and other vegetables, red and orange nasturtiums, tall spikes of lavender, blue lark-spur, and masses of sweet mignonette. 'No, not all bare prose,' correcting herself and pointing to a bed of pansies, looking in the sunshine like a cluster of gold and violet butterflies poised on motionless velvet wings; 'there is a bit of floral painting for you; there is a whole allegory in that.'

'An allegory! why, Queenie, you are actually becoming poetical. If Mr. Logan were here he would tell us that that is a species of violet—*Viola tricolor*—called also pansy.'

'Believe me, there is a higher meaning in that still, butterfly life. Look at this one with glorious violet wings and just one golden eye; does it not look as though it ought to fly instead of remaining so humbly on its green stalk?'

'Well, my "Queen of Sheba," 'half impatiently and half amused, 'what do you make of that? I am not a Solomon, to

answer all your hard questions.'

'I think,' returned Queenie, hesitating, 'that it means to teach us that the true heart's-ease remains content in its own place; it has wings, but they are not ready for flight, they just carry the dew and the sunshine, that is all. Brave little golden hearts, always radiant and smiling,' she continued, lightly brushing the bloom with her finger-tip.

'Mr. Logan!' ejaculated Cathy, elevating her eyebrows in a sort of comic despair, 'will you suggest some appropriate answer in return for this poetical dissertation,' and Queenie,

blushing hotly, dropped the flowers and turned round.

'My dear young lady, I am afraid I startled you,' said Mr. Logan benevolently; 'but I did not like to play the eavesdropper any longer, though Miss Catherine was mischievous enough to try and keep me in the background. As it is, I have stolen a very pretty fancy, which I know will delight Charlotte'.

'Miss Marriott, Mr. Logan,' returned Cathy, with much solemnity. 'I know what a stickler you are for conventionalities and etiquette, Mr. Logan, and I could not suffer you to utter another sentence without due introduction.'

'Is not that a slight deviation from the truth, my dear

Miss Catherine, when you know, at least every one must know, my little failings in that respect? still I was not aware of your friend's name, and I daresay she was equally ignorant of mine.'

'No, indeed,' returned Queenie, trying to maintain her gravity. Cathy's eyes were dancing with fun, like a mischievous kitten; the wicked little creature knew how difficult it was for her friend not to laugh outright.

Mr. Logan certainly presented a curious appearance to a stranger's eyes. The good man was clad in a brown dressing-gown, patched neatly at the elbows with parti-coloured cloth, and his spectacles were pushed up on his forehead, showing a pair of near-sighted blue eyes.

He was a tall spare man, with the plainest face, Queenie thought, she had ever seen, the features were so rugged and irregular; the spectacles and grey hair gave him an elderly appearance. Queenie heard afterwards that he was only in his fortieth year, and that Miss Cosie was quite ten years older.

The eyes were the only redeeming features. Either seen with or without the spectacles they were mild and yet keen; they could beam softly, as they did now at the two girls, with hearty benevolence, or dart searching glances that seemed to quiver like an arrow-point in the recesses of one's conscience. 'They look through and through you,' Cathy said once; 'it is just like throwing a torch into a dark place, it brings all sorts of hidden things to light,—cobwebs and little foolishnesses, and odds and ends of rubbish.'

'I like eyes that talk,' was Queenie's answer to this. She liked Mr. Logan's face, in spite of its plainness; his voice too was so pleasant. She conceived a warm respect for the Vicar of Hepshaw on this first visit. In spite of his somewhat worn and homely appearance, the innate dignity of the man made itself felt as he walked beside them in his old threadbare garment.

'Charlotte; where are you, Charlotte?' he exclaimed, raising his voice as they stood in what was termed the best sitting-room, a somewhat humble apartment with one small window.

'Here, Christopher, my dear,' responded a small chirping voice from the inner recesses of the house, and a tiny woman tripped softly after it. Miss Cosie! who could help giving her the name, she was so small and so compact, with such a comfortable pincushion-like compactness; a little grey mouse of a woman, with her grey dress, and grey Shetland shawl crossed over her shoulders, and the two large glossy curls pinned up on either side of the small head, which she was always patting with her little fat hands.

Why, her very voice had a cosy sound in it. 'My dear' seemed to drop perpetually out of it; it was a caressing, petting sort of voice, with a continual hush in it. 'Hush! there, there, my dear,' was her panacea for every one, from a crying child to a widowed virago. 'There, there, my dear, we can't have him back, but I daresay he is better off,' or 'There, there, my good man, go home to your poor wife,' to a six-foot piece of drunken ruffianism she met staggering through the village and vociferating oaths in the darkness. 'There, there, poor thing, he has lost himself, and is just daft; hush! we won't listen; the devil is schoolmaster to-night, and is teaching him a little bit of his own language.'

Cosie! why, the name was an inspiration; it fitted her to a nicety. Charlotte was simply a badinage, something for which her godmother was to blame, not she; no one but her brother would ever call her by such a term; it was almost crushing—

but Miss Cosie!

Queenie called her by it at once, after the little woman had tripped up to her and lightly kissed her on the cheek, and then patted her with her white dimpled hand.

'There, there, my dear, I knew we should be friends; take off your bonnet and stay, and you shall taste my ginger wine.'

This was always Miss Cosie's first speech to strangers. It was true no one ever wore bonnets in Hepshaw; but it was one of her ways to lament their disuse among the younger generation, as a falling-off of the good old times.

'HATS are such fly-away, foolish things, my dear; now,' as she would say, 'a bonnet is so much more comfortable and becoming, and a pretty face looks so well in it. Shady! nonsense, my love, you can always wear an ugly if you are afraid of your complexion; but bonnets were bonnets in those days,

one did not carry a nosegay tied up in straw then.'

Miss Cosie's one idea in life, next to petting people, was

her brother. No one, in her opinion, could come up to him;

he was simply perfect.

'Such a mind, such a genius, and yet as simple as a child,' she would exclaim. Her love and pride in him fairly bubbled over at times. Christopher, or Kit, as she sometimes called him, was the object of her sisterly idolatry. It was odd and yet touching to see her protecting tenderness; perhaps her ten years' seniority had given the motherly element to her affections. 'You see, Kit is still a boy to me,' she would say sometimes; 'when he was a little fellow I used to put him to bed and sing him to sleep. I never can forget that somehow; and, dear me, my dear, he is still so helpless,—these clever men are, you know,—he never can remember even to put on a warm flannel or take a clean handkerchief out of his drawer; I just have to go in and put everything ready to his hand.'

'Why, when the bishop came once,' continued Miss Cosie, lifting her hands and eyes, 'he was actually going to the station in that brown dressing-gown of his, if I had not run down the lane after him. Think what his lordship would have said at seeing one of his clergy dressed out in that

ragged-robin fashion!'

'I have found out what flower Miss Cosie most resembles,' said Queenie, when, after an hour's chat, they had left the Vicarage. 'Guess, Cathy'

'Little eyebright, I should say, or the ox-eyed daisy.'

'No; the pansy of course. Cathy, how can you be so dense! why, she looks and talks and breathes of nothing but heart's-ease.'

### CHAPTER XIII

#### A VISIT TO ELDERBERRY LODGE

'Children, ay, forsooth,
They bring their own love with them when they come,
But if they come not there is peace and rest;
The pretty lambs! and yet she cries for more:
Why, the world's full of them, and so is heaven—
They are not rare.'—JEAN INGELOW.

THE girls had lingered so long at the vicarage that Cathy postponed their intended walk until after luncheon; but as soon as it was over they sallied forth again, this time with Emmie.

They went through the length and breadth of the village, peeped into the schools, visited one or two of the cottages, crossing Langley more than once on their path; and Queenie was again struck with the bright cheerfulness and cleanliness of the whole place. She took an especial fancy to the post-office—a pretty rustic-looking cottage, with a long garden full of sweet old-fashioned flowers.

'Cathy, I have fallen in love with this place,' she said at last. 'I think life would go on peacefully and well here; look, Emmie, at this empty cottage; is not this just the one you always wanted to live in with Caleb?'

They had just passed the turning that led to Church-Stile House; beyond were a cluster of new-built villas. Emmie clapped her hands and ran breathlessly across the road.

'It has a board up "to let." Oh, Queen, do let us go over it, just for fun; it is such a dear, sweet little house; and what a long garden!—look.'

'We can go in if you like,' returned Cathy, smiling at the child's eagerness. 'I know the woman who takes care of it; it is rather a pretty place, though ill-kept and desolate. I heard Garth say it would let for a mere song.'

Queenie did not answer; a strange thought had been agitating her all the morning, a possibility and a probability that had somehow taken hold of her mind. An odd feeling came over her as she followed Cathy through the little gate—one of those weird overshadowings or previsions that baffle metaphysicians. The place somehow seemed familiar to her; had she seen it in a dream? A dim sense that it belonged to her, that she had trodden that path before, and peeped through the lattice windows, oppressed her with a giddy unreality. Had she conjured it up among the shadows of the old garret? or had she seen a place so nearly approximate that its similarity deceived her? She gave Emmie's hand an involuntary squeeze as they stood in the little porch.

It was certainly a pretty place, in spite of the air of neglect and disuse that pervaded everything. A long narrow lawn in front ran down to the road; opposite was the smart grocer's shop, and the lane that led to the church and vicarage.

Some laburnums and lilacs grew near the house; there was a little border for flowers under the windows; only a ragged-looking sweetwilliam and some weeds grew there now. Behind, an ill-kept lawn sloped down to the house, running on to the back door, giving it a waste, barren look, and imparticulated the state of the

ing an air of dampness to the whole place.

The inside was a little less dreary: the low lattice window, odd-shaped and diamond-paned, gave a picturesque finish to the rooms; the little square hall was pleasant. There were two sitting-rooms, one much smaller than the other, with a front view that was sufficiently cheerful; and a large barelooking apartment, with two windows looking out on the steep green waste behind. Nettles and docks and festoons of coarselooking ivy climbed about the window ledges. The kitchen was small and dull. Upstairs, three rooms in different stages of dampness opened out on the dark landing. Some of the paper was torn off, and hung in moist curling lengths. A scurry and patter of tiny feet sounded beside them; they were evidently tenanted by families of mice.

'It is a miserable place after all,' observed Cathy. 'Take care, one of those boards is rotten, Emmie; my foot nearly

went through just now.'

'I don't know,' returned Queenie hesitatingly, 'I think I have taken a fancy to it; it might be made very pretty with fresh papers and a little paint. To whom does it

belong 1'

'To Captain Fawcett. We are going there directly; langley has given me a message for Mrs. Fawcett. Oh, do come to the window a moment, Queen; there is Mrs. Morris stopping at the corner to speak to the three Miss Palmers. Lank at the dear old creatures, dressed just alike. There you have all the aristocracy of Hepshaw, with the exception of Church-Stile House and the vicarage people.'

'I've you mean that constitutes your society!' inquired Queenia, pressing closer to the dirty panes, and trying to inspect critically the flock of womanhood gathered round

Greywon's smart window.

What would you ask more! returned her companion drily; we don't have balls and concerts in Hepshaw. To dine with the Pawcetts and drink tea with Mrs. Morris and the Miss Palmer are our sole dissipation. Ted finds so much ten a little intextenting, and prefers sometimes staying at home; but Langley and Garth always do their duty manfully."

"I like the look of Mrs. Morris, she is tall and gracefullooking; but I cannot see her face under that brown mushroom.

ls about the Court i

'Mum' there are widows and widows. She is not the "widow maked" St. Paul talks about that I won't tell tales. She has a precty home, and seven little hopes, more or less red-harred, his the deceased and ever-lamented Major Morris also dear Minumi to whose loss site owes her present Mighted and remarkably healthy existence.

Obchy, how can you make off people so. I tell you I

like she look it her

Note it. She has where needs and bright eyes, which she knows how to use. To you see the lifetenen they are taking now! Twit have the wheels if his marror. I first than our wagneric coming up from Varschale! Never mind not non-seeds allowing we must talk goests sometimes in this invary.

place. Mrs. Morris is very good-natured and very clever, and the seven little hopes are clean, wholesome children.'

'Look! your brother is stopping to speak to them.'

'Of course; as though he would pass the Palmers! You have no idea how fond the dear old things are of him. They pet him, and knit endless mittens and comforters for him; he has a drawer full, I believe. Look at them now, wagging their heads and fluttering round him like a flock of grey pigeons; that is Miss Faith, his favourite, near him now.'

'Faith; what a curious name!

'Oh, they are each a cardinal virtue; they must have had devout parents. The eldest is Hope, then comes Prudence and Charity, and lastly, Faith. Faith is much the nicest and the prettiest; she is comparatively young too.'

'I should like to go and see them.'

'Then you shall, but not this afternoon; we shall only have time for the Fawcetts. Their house is full of curious odds and ends, and though they dress alike they have separate rooms, which they have furnished after their own taste. I must coax them to let you see them; it will give you an insight into their characters.'

'And they have none of them married,' exclaimed Queenie, with a girl's involuntary pity for the monotonous existence

of single blessedness.

- 'How could they?' returned Cathy, with a puzzled elevation of her eyebrows. 'They have lived in Hepshaw all their lives; they could not have possibly seen any gentleman except the Vicar, and I daresay he was married. You would not have a lawyer's daughter commit the unpardonable crime of entering into a mésalliance with the innkeeper or the chemist!' continued Cathy, drawing down her lips at the corner, and speaking in a 'prunes-and-prism' voice. 'That is Miss Hope; and so the poor cardinal virtues have wasted all their sweetness on the desert air?'
  - 'How very sad,' began Queenie; but Cathy suddenly cut her short.
  - 'Not at all,' was the somewhat stormy rejoinder; 'people are just as well without marrying. For my part, I think men are a mistake. I am sick to death of schoolgirl rubbish; half the girls at Miss Titheridge's pretended to be in love,

and with such creatures too! any masculine face approaching to the ideal of a barber's block was pronounced handsome, fascinating. You know how you hated it all, Queenie.'

'As I hate all sham.'

'Faugh! the thought of all the three-volume trash I swallowed gives me moral dyspepsia even now. I recollect it was the fashion one term to have a cour serve; every one had an experience or a disappointment. I know half the school was in love with Garth. Well, we have flattened our faces long enough against this bottle-green glass; now we must go on to Elderberry Lodge.'

'Is that Captain Fawcett's?'

'Yes; Mrs. Morris's, next door, is the Sycamores, and the Miss Palmers' is the Evergreens. Now I have talked myself hoarse for your benefit; it is your ladyship's turn now. There is the Captain himself working in his front garden; is he not a fine-looking man, Queenie?'

Queenie acquiesced, as the tall soldierly figure walked down to the gate to greet them. She liked the brown weatherbeaten face, with its grizzled moustache and closely-cropped head, looking as though it were covered with grey bristles.

'Good afternoon, ladies. I saw Miss Clayton just now, and she told me you were coming. Fine weather for the crops. I was just pottering among my geraniums. Sit down, both of you, while I go into the house and find my little woman;

she's palavering with the maids somewhere.'

'Please don't hurry her, Captain Fawcett; we shall be very comfortable out here under this awning. Isn't this a delicious little garden! look at those roses and beehives. Do you know, the Captain's garden is his hobby; he spends the greater part of his time working here, and in his kitchen-garden. He has the greatest show of flowers for miles round.'

'Have they no children?'

'They had one, a girl, but she died. I almost wish we had not brought Emmie; I think Alice was just twelve when she caught the fever. It is eight or nine years ago, but they have never got over it. Ah, there comes the Captain with his "little woman."

Queenie stifled an exclamation as she rose from her seat. Mrs. Fawcett was as tall as her husband,—a thin, longnecked woman, fully six feet high, and gaunt almost to scragginess.

She had a worn, anxious-looking face; it was difficult to imagine it had ever been young or good-looking. The prominent teeth, high cheek-bones, and scanty grey hair, told no tale of past beauty. It was a plain face, grown plainer with age. She looked like a caricature of her husband's taste beside his handsome old face and grand figure.

Her hand-shake was almost masculine in its grasp, and her voice was harsh, but not ungentle; but both face and voice softened strangely at the first sight of Emmie. The

husband and wife exchanged looks.

'Do you see, Captain?'
'Aye, aye, missus, I see.'

'Is this your little sister, Miss Marriott? Come to me,

darling; how old are you?'

'Twelve,' repeated Emmie, looking up in her face with solemn blue eyes. Emmie rarely smiled with strangers.

'Twelve; do you hear that, Joshua?'

'Aye, aye, I hear it, little woman.'

'Just her age,' repeated the wife hurriedly, laying her hand on his arm, while her eyes filled with tears.

'Twelve years and three months,' he repeated involuntarily.

'And she has Alice's blue eyes too,—your own colour, Captain.'

The girls had listened with silent sympathy to this brief interchange of sorrowful questioning; but now Emmie interrupted them. She drew closer to Mrs. Fawcett, and laid a hand confidingly on her lap.

'Was Alice the name of your little girl? Cathy said you

had one.'

'Hush, Emmie; come here to me, love;' but Emmie

hung back from her friend's extended hand.

'Yes; her name was Alice; she is still my little girl,' returned the poor mother, speaking with her pure maternal faith, and unconsciously verifying the eternity of love; 'the treasure once given never really lost, only placed in safe keeping.'

'Of course she is your little girl,' was Emmie's answer.
'You mean to see her again some day, only she is not keeping.

house with you now; perhaps she would have got tired. God would know all about that; He does not like children to be tired; He was very nearly taking me away for the same reason, only I got rested somehow.'

'Captain, do you hear that?'

'Aye, poor bairn; too big a mind for so small a body.'

'Am I like her?' persisted Emmie curiously, looking up into the plain face, now softened into motherly comeliness, the beautifier, love, smoothing out irregularities and rough-

nesses even on Mrs. Fawcett's unlovely visage.

Queenie heard afterwards that she had never been handsome even in her youth, but that she had been loved, as some plain women are by men, with a constancy and devotion which many a spoiled beauty fails to win. 'He must have seen the real goodness shining behind her plainness,' Cathy said afterwards, when Queenie and she talked the matter over.

'Are you like her, darling?' answered Mrs. Fawcett mournfully. 'You have her large blue eyes; but, until she fell ill, she had rosy cheeks and long dark curls. She was the

very image of her father, the dear angel.'

'My hair has been cut off,' returned Emmie, pointing to the soft little rings just peeping under her cap; 'it means to curl too some day. I have always longed for curls; the angels always have them in pictures.'

'Come with me, my little maid, and look at my roses,' interrupted the Captain, reading his wife's troubled countenance aright. The tears streamed over the thin face as Emmie

trotted happily away with him.

'That is just the way they walked hand in hand every morning to look at the roses,' sobbed the poor mother. "Father's roses" were the last words Alice ever said; "I should like one of father's roses;" and when he went out to pick her one she put her head down on my shoulder and then she was gone.'

Queenie's long eyelashes glittered with sympathising tears. She could enter into all; she had so nearly lost Emmie. She thought of the father going down to his garden to pick red and white roses for the little dead hand that could not open to receive them. 'My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to

gather lilies: 'those beautiful words of the Canticles came into her mind. What if in Paradise, while parents wept below for them that are not, the children they had lost went in bright bands after One who died for them, when He 'went down into His garden to gather lilies!'

The girls were rather subdued when they bade good-bye to the good Captain and his wife, and turned into the little lane. Cathy pushed her hat restlessly from her forehead; some thought or discontent wrinkled it,

'What lots of good people there are in the world after

all,' she half grumbled.

'There are two there,' returned her friend, with a gesture of her hands towards Elderberry Lodge. 'My visit there has made me sad, and yet it has done me good. I am so glad we went, Cathy.'

'Good people seem to agree with you; they never make

you discontented, as they do me.'

'No; I like standing on tiptoe till my neck aches. I love size, bigness, grand moral structure; it does one good to breathe the same air with some people; it is like resting on a hilltop and enjoying a wide beautiful view. I don't mind at all being a pigmy among giants. If I had been Gulliver I should have had small sympathy with the Lilliputians. Littleness of mind is abhorrent to me.'

'There you go,' grumbled Cathy; 'you sensible people are enough to drive one crazy. Overmuch goodness makes

me vixenish; I feel inclined to fly in the face of it.'

'You foolish child.'

'Mr. Logan is often too much for me, and so is Miss Cosie; I run away from them both sometimes. I'll own, if you like, the disease is infectious to those predisposed to it. If you stay long enough in their vicinity you might catch it, you know. Prevention is better than cure; so, for fear I get too good, I just run away,' finished Cathy in her droll manner.

In the front court they came upon Garth digging up a little flower-border under the hall window. He threw down his spade when he saw them.

'Well, I've settled about the picnic in the granite quarry. We will go to-morrow.'

'Garth, you are a brick; I mean a dear old fellow. Oh,' folding her hands pathetically, 'don't tell of me, the word only slipped out just by accident. Have you really arranged it?'

'Yes; I have had a talk with Langley. She says we must not lose the fine weather. It is not to be a grand affair, mind. Only the Logans and Fawcetts and Miss Faith; yes, and Harry Chester.'

'King Karl! Oh, I am so glad. Why, when did you see

him ?'

'He and Nanette are in there,' pointing to the drawing-room. 'Don't let me keep you if you want to introduce him to Miss Marriott,' as Cathy looked eager and irresolute. 'He is a very old friend of ours, and a great favourite with the whole family,' he continued, speaking to Queenie; 'in fact. Harry is a favourite with every one.'

'Let her judge for herself,' returned his sister impatiently.
'Come, Queenie, let us go in; I have set my heart on being

the first to introduce you to the King of Karldale.'

# CHAPTER XIV IN THE GRANITE QUARRY

But still she found, or rather thought she found, Her own worth wanting, others to abound; Ascribed above their due to every one, Unjust and scanty to herself alone. - DRYDEN.

QUEEN, this is our old friend, Mr. Chester, commonly known in the district as the King of Karldale; he plays Damon to Garth's Pythias, and is a sort of useful Family Friend to us all.'

Cathy's entrance as usual effected a sort of whirlwind; her swift movements and flowing draperies swept breezelike through the quiet room. Langley's low-toned 'hush' was no check on her volubility. A look of amusement crossed Mr. Chester's face as he stood up and greeted the newcomers.

'Irrepressible as usual, Cathy,' was his only comment, as he reseated himself beside Langley, and took up his little daughter, a solemn-faced child of four, on his knee.

Queenie regarded the pair critically. On the whole the

survey contented her.

The King of Karldale was a tall, powerfully-built man, with a florid handsome face, and fair moustache, a countenance marked more by good nature than intellect, but bearing the stamp of plain honest common sense.

Queenie wondered if it were her fancy, that a vague uneasiness pervaded the man's gait at times. In spite of his cheerfulness and hearty laugh there were hints of past or present troubles in the worn lines round the kindly eyes; even in the midst of their pleasant talk a shadow now and then crossed his face, as though some unwelcome remembrance obtruded itself.

Strange to say, there was little or no resemblance between the child and him.

Nan was evidently a character.

She sat perched on her father's knee in her little white pelisse and sun-bonnet, with a large woolly lamb in her arms, staring at Queenie with great dark eyes.

Queenie noticed that now and then one small hand would furtively touch her father's coat-sleeve, and she would stroke the rough grey tweed with a look of infinite contentment, but showed no impatience or weariness during the long discussion that followed the girls' entrance.

'Is my little mouse tired? is not Nan very tired?' said Mr. Chester, at last stooping to peep under the sun-bonnet.

Queenie caught the look, and then she said to herself, 'That little bright-eyed child is his idol.'

'Nan is not so very tired, father,' pronounced the little creature with a slight lisp, and a stress on the word, very; 'a little, only a very little.'

'Then we will go, my pet; say good-bye to Langley,' and Nan obediently slid down from her father's knee, and trotted

with sturdy compactness across the room.

Queenie stood with the sisters in the porch and watched them cross the tiny moat under the dark sycamores, Nan wrapt up in a grey rug, and seated comfortably in her little chair-saddle on the back of an old white pony, her white lamb still hugged in her arms, her father holding the reins, and mounted on a handsome brown mare. 'Nan has found her voice now; do you hear how she is chattering to him, Langley?' observed Cathy in an amused voice. 'How those two dote on each other! No wonder Gertrude is jealous, the child cares nothing for her mother; but then Gertrude is too selfish to make a fuss over any one but herself.'

'Hush, my dear; what a terribly sweeping assertion! Gertrude is an undemonstrative woman, one cannot tell how deeply she feels.'

And Harry is a demonstrative man, and ought to have a wife who understands and makes much of him, instead of one

who frets and teases him from morning to night. It is no good talking to me,' continued Cathy, with a burst of vindictiveness rather surprising from its suddenness, 'I detest that woman, with her slim figure and dark eyes, and little would-be elegancies. She to be Harry's wife and the mother of Nan! Why, I would not trust a pet dog to her tender mercies and small tempers.'

'Cathy, all this is highly unnecessary,' remonstrated her sister in a pained tone. Her face looked a little paler and sadder as she went back into the house after uttering her little protest. A child's white woollen glove lay on the carpet beside a stray sunbeam. Queenie, following her, saw as she stooped to pick it up that she touched it lightly with her lips before laying it aside in her work-basket.

The next day was warm and bright, 'regular Queen's weather,' as Cathy chose to call it; and at the time appointed a merry little party assembled at the door of the Deerhound,

and filled the two waggonettes.

Garth had gone over to the Quarry, and left his brother as his deputy, and a playful dispute ensued between him and Captain Fawcett concerning the selection of the occupants of each waggonette. 'The difficulty of suiting folk was truly awful,' as Ted expressed it feelingly.

Captain Fawcett had secured Langley and Miss Faith Palmer, and his wife and Miss Cosie had tucked in Emmie between them, just as Ted had slyly beckoned to the girls to favour him.

Mr. Logan and Mr. Chester had followed, and Nan was carefully lifted in and placed beside her father.

'Do you mean to say that mite of a child is going with us to the Quarry?' interposed Mrs. Fawcett in genuine dismay. 'What can her mother be thinking about?'

'Hush! her father takes her everywhere with him,' replied Langley softly; 'she is out with him all day on the farm; she is never tired. I know he has often carried her for miles, or walked beside her pony.

'Dear, dear! what a mistake,' ejaculated Miss Cosie, straightening her brown 'ugly,' in the depths of which the gentle little mouse face was almost buried from view, and trying to pat the big curls. 'A child of that tender age ought to be with her mother. It reminds one of the child in Kings—or was it in Samuel?—who got sunstroke, or something of the kind, and cried, "My head, my head," and they carried him to his mother. Think if something of that kind happened to that dear child! her father would never forgive himself; but there, there, he does it for the best, poor dear.'

'The child frets after him, and is never happy away from him,' replied Langley in a low voice, for Mrs. Fawcett's eyes had filled with tears, and she had taken Emmie's hand in hers. 'Mrs. Chester is a nervous invalid; and one cannot judge in

these cases,' finished Langley in a deprecating voice.

'True, my dear, true; but I am such an advocate of mothers' rights, as I often tell Kit; there is something so especially sacred in the claims of maternity. Bless you, I know all about their feelings as much as if I had a dozen children,' continued the little woman brightly. 'Didn't I have a dear old mother myself, and Kit her very image, poor soul; and didn't she often say, "Charlotte, my dear, you will know one day, please God, what a mother's feelings are "? And so I do, my dear; and so does every woman, married and single,' finished Miss Cosie with a little burst, 'as long as there are young things in the world needing our care.'

'You are right,' returned Langley in a stifled voice; and just then the other waggonette passed, Ted cracking his whip and gesticulating boyishly. Nan was on her father's knee as usual, the little white sun-bonnet rested on his shoulder, the quiet dark eyes and rosy face full of a child's contentment.

Garth received his guests at the entrance to the works, and did the honours of the place with great dignity. 'Is not the dear old fellow just in his element?' whispered Ted to Cathy, as they stood behind the others. Queenie caught the whisper and smiled to herself.

'He looks just what he is, a ruler among men; one who ought to be a leader, who expects obedience as a right,' she thought, as she watched the tall athletic figure moving through the sheds crowded with workmen. 'The old grey coat and felt hat just suited him,' she thought. Though he carried his head so high he had a pleasant word or look for the men.

'My fellows are such splendid workmen,' he said once, with a little conscious pride in his manner. The words, 'My



men, 'my boys,' were perpetually on his lips. Here, on his own domain, among his subjects, he felt and moved as a sort of king. 'Rival monarchs, my dear,' observed Cathy mischievously—'King Karl and the King of Warstdale.'

To Queenie the whole scene was strangely picturesque—the blue sky; the open sheds full of noisy workers; the whirr of machinery; the great blocks of rough-hewn granite, grey, fresh from the quarries; then the smooth polished slabs, shining with softly-mingled tints. The process, the amount of hard, patient labour, astonished the girl. She could have stood for a long time watching the masons chiselling and fine-boring the hard stone. Piles of grey and pink granite lay in the centre, carved and shaped into headstones.

Mr. Logan inspected them thoughtfully.

'White marble is more beautiful, especially for the graves of women and children,' she heard him say to Captain Fawcett; 'but then granite is more impervious to weather. In cemeteries, for instance, where there are trees the constant dropping and damp stains and defaces the beauty of the marble; but nothing spoils the granite.'

'Nothing, to my mind, beats Warstdale granite,' replied the Captain meditatively. 'Marble is too white and chilly for our English cemeteries; we want Italian sun to light it up. Look at these warm tints; here is colouring, durability, everything we want. Can anything be finer than this polish?'

Queenie was listening to them with interest when Garth came up and claimed her attention.

'While they are getting the quarry engine ready I want to show you the workmen's cottages, and the room where Langley and I have our classes,' said the young man a little eagerly. He looked bright and somewhat happy, flushed with playing the part of host and cicerone to so many ladies. His white teeth gleamed with a bright smile under his dark moustache; but for all that his tone had a slight accent of pride that made Queenie smile as she followed him.

'You are master here—Garth Clayton of Warstdale—and I am a poor little school-teacher, a nobody,' thought the girl, with just a faint touch of rebellion, growing hot all at once.

'Stay, this is rough walking; let me give you some help,'

and he turned back and held out his hand. For a moment Queenie hesitated; it was her nature to be independent, and walk alone. She never willingly owned to any small feminine 'If she fell she could pick herself up,' she always weakness. said; but a glance at the kind bright face changed her resolution. She took the offered hand without any demur, and let herself be guided through the intricacies of the path as meekly as Nan, who followed them, holding tightly to her father's sleeve. She stood quietly beside him, an appreciative and most sympathising listener, as he explained, with pardonable egotism, all his little schemes and plans for the comfort of his workmen. 'My boys deserve all that I can do for them. they are such good fellows, and clever, too, some of them. Why, there is Daniel Armstrong;' and here followed a string of anecdotes bearing on the cleverness of this man, the gratitude and good feeling of another, the sad troubles of a third, until Ted came down on them in a whirlwind of indignation, to know what Garth meant by keeping them all waiting?

'All right, Ted; go on with Miss Marriott,' returned his brother good-humouredly, breaking in upon the lad's wrath. 'I am going to carry Nan;' and, as the little lady looked dubious, and clung close to her father, he caught her up and seated her lightly on his shoulder and marched off with her, a smile breaking over Nan's face as her father clapped his hands

after her.

The little engine was already waiting for them; and the trucks were furnished with boxes and hampers, which formed seats for the ladies. Emmie crept up to her sister to whisper her ecstasies. 'She had never been so happy in her life; every one was so good to her, that kind Mrs. Fawcett especially; and Miss Cosie and Miss Faith Palmer; she was sure she would love Miss Faith dearly; and did not Queenie think she was very pretty?'

'She certainly had been,' Queenie thought, 'though no longer young.' It was a very sweet, lovable face still, though with a certain sadness of repression on it—the shadowing of an over-quiet life. Colouring would still have lent it beauty; but, as it was, the pallid neutral tints harmonised with the grey Quaker-like costume and little close bonnet. The voice

was very sweet, but lacked enthusiasm; it touched one like some plaintive minor chord; it was the face and voice that one meets behind the gratings of nunneries, or in the hushed wards of a hospital, where youth finds no place, and the bustle of life is shut out.

She placed herself by Queenie as the engine steamed off, somewhat slowly, and the work-sheds receded from their view.

'You must come and see my sisters. One of them, Charity, is an invalid, and the sight of a fresh face is such a treat to her. Her world is bounded by four walls, and she lives in her books. She knows far more about it than I do, who was never a reader,' said the quiet woman with a little sigh.

Queenie fell in love with Miss Faith on the spot, as she told Cathy afterwards. Young as she was, she knew far more of the world than this woman of thirty-five. The unsophisticated freshness of the simple woman, her tender voice, her old-fashioned ways, and little quaint pedantries, charmed the young governess, grown bitter with the hard edge of life. Before the day was out she learnt a good deal about 'the Sisterhood,' as Garth and Cathy always called the Evergreens, where the Palmers lived. The eldest sister, Hope, was cosmopolitan in her charities,—knitted woollen jugs and socks for the missionary boxes of half the neighbourhood, was a strong advocate of the temperance movement, and was a little shaky in her church principles, having, as her sisters well knew, a decided leaning to the society of the Plymouth Sisters.

The second sister, Prudence, managed the household, and divided her time between her storeroom and her district. 'I am not as clever as the others; but I wait on Charity,' said Miss Faith, with an unconscious pathos in her voice.

"Faith waiting on Charity." Poor cardinal virtues,' thought the girl, with a little smile of amusement over the odd play of words. I suppose Faith has plenty of waiting and looking up in this world. To judge by some women's lives, some must wait for ever,' soliloquised the young philosopher with a sigh.

She speculated for a short time on this Charity, who had been handsomer than any of them, and had met with an accident in her youth, whose view was bounded by four walls, and who lived in her books. 'My dear Miss Marriott, Cara is so clever. You should hear her talk. She and Mr. Logan have such interesting conversation; it is quite wonderful to hear them. What a blessing it is to have a well-stored mind; no empty space for discontent to creep in, as Cara says. I often wish I were clever,' continued the simple woman, 'and then one would not need to perplex one's self so about the meanings of things. Life never seems such a puzzle to Cara as it does to me.'

But here Cathy, who had overheard the last sentences,

interrupted her scornfully.

'Do you call it life?' curling her lip scornfully. 'Are such meagre existences really life? Life presupposes movement, animation, sensation, colouring, plenty of work, but above all, movement; not sitting in a close room, putting in patches and listening to chapters of Physical Geography. Every one knows you are a saint, Miss Faith,' continued Cathy enthusiastically. 'I know Garth thinks so. But, all the same, life means a little more than patches and dissertations on the Gulf Stream.'

'You young things are so impetuous,' returned poor Miss Faith with a tremulous smile; 'perhaps at your age one may have felt the same. There is a sort of fever in young blood, I think. I remember how we used to feel in the springtime; it made one's pulses beat faster only to hear the birds singing in their little new nests.'

'You thought of something else besides patching then,'

persisted Cathy rebelliously.

'My dear, I love sewing; and then what else can one do when one is not clever. I used to wish I could find work in some children's hospital; nursing is my forte, you know. I think I could have been quite happy if I had some young creatures round me. I tried for a little while, you remember; and then Cara wanted me, and I came home.'

'And I have never forgiven Cara to this day,' was the angry response. 'You looked like a different woman when you came home from Carlisle, Miss Faith,—years younger and

brighter, and----'

'Hush, my dear, hush! I am not very clever, but I have learned one thing,—never to leave a certain duty for an uncertain one. It is a safe rule; you will find it so, Cathy.

I often think of my children, and long to be back with them; but nothing would induce me to leave Cara while she wants me.'

There was a slight lull in the conversation, and Miss Faith's voice dropped to a whisper. A fresh wind blew over the wide moor. Some black-faced mountain sheep browsed among the heather; one of them had strayed on to the line, and the little engine slackened speed. The wild, somewhat barren scenery, the novel mode of traffic, the sweet moorland air, charmed and exhilarated Queenie; she squeezed Emmie's hand as the child whispered to her, 'Don't you love Miss Faith?' 'Faith waiting on Charity,' she said to herself with a little sigh.

The quarry was in sight by this time. Trucks of the blasted stones were being shunted hither and thither; then came the work-sheds and ponderous machinery. Queenie followed the others, as Garth led them from one point to another. She listened as breathlessly as Emmie to his description of the blasting; she tried to imagine the vast report echoing over those lonely moors, the terrified sheep huddled far away in heaps, the masses of fallen rocks, and then started a little as she found Garth looking down at her with earnest eyes.

'All this is new to you, a fresh experience. You have not hewn lessons out of rocks all your life long, as I have,' observed the young man sententiously.

'No,' she answered a little timidly; 'but then I am only

a governess.'

'That means a bookworm. Are you very learned, Miss Marriott? I wonder you have not frightened Langley. Rocks and men have been my books,' continued Garth, waving his hand at the rough cliff half torn down, but wearing graceful fronds of ferns in its crevices. 'There are hard durable lessons to be learnt here: how to overcome difficulties, how to war with opposition. I would rather be here among my quarrymen than on the benches of the House of Commons.'

Queenie gave a swift upward glance, but did not answer. 'A king among men,' she was saying to herself softly.

'You cannot think how I pity business men in cities,'

Garth went on, as he walked beside her. 'Boys fresh from school chained for the best part of their lives to the desk; cramped up in a close atmosphere, bringing all their best energies, their choicest talents, down to the level of dull routine, -- money - getting, money - loving, -- narrowed to a perfect machinery of existence.'

'I think you are a little unjust and prejudiced there,' replied Queenie, with some spirit; 'you may love your life best, and I daresay you are right. You have freedom and

rule, two very good things.'

'And plenty of fresh air,' put in Garth, baring his head

as he spoke to the sweet moorland wind that met them.

'Yes. and that too. But these men are to be honoured, because they make the best of their life. Many of them do not like it; a few rebel; others get cramped and narrowed, as you say. But to do one's work in the world, and to do it worthily,-however distasteful and full of drudgery and routine it may be, - is to be a man in the truest sense of the word,' finished Queenie, with a sudden sparkle in her brown eyes.

'Very properly put. Do you think I do not agree with you? I am only comparing my lot with others, a little to their disparagement. There is Ted, that brother of mine,—would you believe it, Miss Marriott!—I think you must take him in hand, and preach contentment,—he vows this place is a howling desert; no society; not a thing to do. It must be owned,' continued Garth candidly, 'that for a fellow without resources Hepshaw may be a trifle dull, especially in the winter.'

'Do you never find it so, Mr. Clayton?' asked Queenie, with a little natural surprise. It still seemed strange to her that this man, so young and distinguished-looking, should own himself contented with a position where he had few equals and no superiors.

'Dull! do you mean to compare me to Ted, who is lazy, and has no resources?' returned the young man, slightly discomfited. 'What is there that my life lacks? I have a good home, sisters, a plague of a brother. It is my own fault, I suppose, if I have no closer ties,' continued Garth, with a little laugh, and colouring slightly; 'but there is

plenty of time for that. I have more work than I know how to do; and then there is cricket and football; and lectures and the chess-club for winter evenings. I sometimes wish my days were double their length. That does not look like dulness,' finished Garth, in a chafed tone, as though something in her words had offended him.

Queenie held her ground a little obstinately; she was on the brink of a discovery. What was the one jarring element in this honest sweet nature? Was it pride? or——

'You may have all this, and yet you may miss a great deal of what your despised city men call life,' she went on, with an old-fashioned sagacity that surprised the young man, who was simple enough in his way. 'You miss contact with other minds. Here you can have no opportunity of gleaning new ideas. There must be a certain amount of stagnation here. Cathy knows what I mean; she and I have often talked of it.' She finished with slight abruptness, somewhat provoked by the incredulous smile that rose to his lips.

'Stagnation here!' How Queenie wished he would not repeat her words. 'You are hard on us and Hepshaw. Of course we are simple country folk; we do not aspire to be anything else; but a peaceful and independent existence does

not necessarily mean stagnation.'

'Mr. Clayton, why will you persist in misunderstanding me?' returned Queenie, in a vexed voice. They were standing at the extreme edge of a jutting piece of rock; the others had turned back, and were watching some machinery at work; below them lay the wide moor. Some peewits were flitting hither and thither; a bank of white clouds sailed slowly away westward. 'I am not hard on Hepshaw; I feel already that I love it dearly. I only thought that you, being a man, must sometimes long for a little more society.'

'Because I am like Ted, and have no resources, I suppose?' but this time there was a mollified gleam in his eyes. 'I think I am one of the quiet sort; a few friends content me. Mr. Logan is a host in himself, with sufficient information to stock half a dozen ordinary men, not to mention Captain Fawcett, who has travelled and seen the world; and then we have Harry Chester at Karldale, and Mr. Ray, the Vicar of Karlsmere, and the Sowerbys of Blandale Grange,—very

sensible good people,—and the Cunninghams, Dora and her father at Crossgill Vicarage. My sisters must take you over there, Miss Marriott. One can have friends enough for the asking,' continued Garth loftily. 'I always disliked crowds of acquaintances; I am not like Ted.'

Queenie gave him an understanding glance, but her closed lips offered no response. The shrewd little observer of human nature was saying to herself, 'I have found you out, Mr. Clayton; you are good, but you are not perfect. Cathy is right. It is better, so you think, to be the leading man in Hepshaw, and king in Warstdale, than to be simply Mr. Clayton in London or Carlisle; to lord it over inferior minds than to mix with superior intelligences;' and, as she recognised this trait, something like a pang of disappointment crossed her mind.

Was he not a sort of hero to her? and ought not heroes to be perfect?

'It strikes me that I have been very egotistical, and that you must be very tired,' he said at last, rousing her from her reverie, and turning his bright face full on her with such a kindly look that her brief disdain died from that moment. 'Let us come and see how Ted has managed the luncheon; he always acts as my steward on these occasions.'

'I wonder who Dora is,' thought Queenie, as they walked leisurely back behind some laden trucks. 'I wonder if Cathy has ever mentioned her. Dora Cunningham and her

father at Crossgill Vicarage!'

# CHAPTER XV

## QUEENIE'S COUNSELLOR

Thou cam'st not to thy place by accident,—
It is the very place God meant for thee;
And should'st thou there small scope for action see,
Do not for this give room to discontent.'—TRENCH.

TED had proved himself an able steward, and a sufficiently luxurious luncheon had been conjured up for their refreshment.

Queenie had never in her life been present at a stranger picnic,—a table had been set at the base of a jutting cliff, and boxes and emptied hampers formed rude seats for the party. The brothers presided, and Ted's boyish face beamed with innocent satisfaction at the result of his successful management. 'Isn't this firstrate,' he whispered to Queenie, who sat beside him. 'Not a drop of rain to spoil enjoyment, and only enough wind to blow the table-cloth off once. We broke one bottle of cream, but that's nothing; you must have some champagne. Garth always does things handsomely for the ladies. Miss Cosie,' persuasively, 'you will have just half a glass to drink Garth's health?'

'My dear, not a drop; what an idea, and I a total abstainer!' and Miss Cosie's big curls quite shook with excitement. 'I wish you and your dear brother would think with me on this subject. If only more of his men would sign the pledge; fancy Hepshaw without a single publichouse! why, it would be paradise over again,' continued the little woman, patting his coat-sleeve in her energy; 'but there, there, my dear, we can't expect old heads on young shoulders.'

After luncheon the party broke up into twos and threes. Garth had half an hour's business to transact; Ted volunteered to help Miss Faith and Cathy in their search for ferns; Langley and Miss Cosie superintended the repacking of hampers; while Captain Fawcett strolled with Mr. Chester across the moor, leaving his wife in delighted guard over the two children. Queenie had declined to join in the fern scramble, and she and Mr. Logan seated themselves on some granite boulders; there Garth found them on his return. More than an hour had elapsed, the rest of the party had disappeared. Nan and Emmie were playing at fortifications among the rocks. A merry voice from the cliff above called to Mr. Logan; he pushed his spectacles off his forehead in a perplexed way as he rose slowly in obedience to the summons.

'You and I will talk about this again, my dear young lady, we have plenty of time; nothing need be settled in a hurry. I confess you have taken me somewhat by surprise, but I will promise you that I will think well over it, and let

vou know.'

'What are you and the Vicar prosing about?' asked Garth with good-humoured curiosity, as he threw himself down on an old shepherd's plaid beside her, and stretched 'Has the dear old pedant been treating himself luxuriously. you to the results of some of his antiquarian researches? You

look tired and grave, Miss Marriott.'

'Because I have been discussing a grave subject,' she returned, rather nervously, pulling at some grasses that grew between the stones, and splitting the thin stalks of the weeds as she spoke. 'I was asking Mr. Logan's advice about something; most likely he will speak to you; at least he said he recommended me to speak myself,' faltered Queenie, growing pale all at once with the difficulty of imparting her plans to a stranger.

'You are in some uncertainty; you want advice, assistance, and you do not like to trust such new acquaintances,' he replied quietly, with such thorough comprehension of her unusual diffidence, and with such evident intention of breaking through it, that Queenie's uncomfortable timidity yielded a

little.

'I am only a stranger among you, and I have no right

to trouble you with my affairs; only Mr. Logan said-' but he interrupted her with good-humoured peremptoriness.

'You shall tell me by and by what Mr. Logan said. us settle this little piece of business first. I like to be troubled with other people's affairs, it is a hobby of mine, and makes me feel of more consequence;' and then, a little gravely, 'I do not look upon my sister's intimate friends as strangers.'

'You are very kind,' hesitating.

'We mean to be, if you will allow us such a privilege. Miss Marriott. I hope you mean to tell us how we can be of service to you and your little sister. You want advice. you say? I am not so clever as Mr. Logan; but then, every one knows business men are more practical than the clergy. Supposing you tell me all about it, your plan and everything,' finished Garth, in a comfortable, matter-of-fact tone, as he stretched himself again on the shepherd's plaid, but at the same time he shot a keen anxious glance at the young face above him; and, indeed, the sadness in Queenie's brown eyes might have touched a harder heart than Garth's.

'There is little to say,' she replied, with a quick flush. was one thing telling her troubles to Mr. Logan, who was kind and fatherly, and who looked about fifty, whatever his age might be; but to tell them to this young man, who spoke to her with such pleasant peremptoriness, who was at once gentle and yet masterful, who never let her forget for a moment that he was Garth Clayton of Warstdale, well, it was different. And yet he might be able to help her and Emmie.

'Oh, it is so painful to have to trouble you with such things,' she said with a little impatience and quiver of suppressed annoyance in her voice; 'that is the worst of being a woman, that one must be helpless, and trouble people.'

'I rather enjoy this sort of trouble,' he replied coolly; 'I like to be of use, and to give advice. We are only wasting time, and the others will be back. Supposing you tell me all about it,' continued Garth, with a bright persuasive smile. quite comprehending her difficulty, but making light of it in his masculine way. 'I am much younger than the Vicar, but you will find that we business men are just as much to be trusted.'

'Yes; I know. I think men have the best of it in everything,' continued poor Queenie, ashamed of her irritation, and yet conscious of feeling it all the time. 'They are independent, they can carve out their own lot in life; it is women only who are so helpless. After all, there is little to tell. I am not ashamed of being poor; I never was in my life. I want to work for myself and Emmie, and I think I have found something that will suit me in Hepshaw.'

'In Hepshaw!' Garth raised himself on his elbow, and

gazed at her in unfeigned astonishment.

'Yes; it is humble, but I know it will suit me; and then Emmie will have country air, and we shall not be separated. You look surprised, Mr. Clayton; surely you guess what I mean! Cathy tells me that you are going to lose your girls' schoolmistress, and I want Mr. Logan to elect me in her stead.'

'And what did he say?' asked Garth in a tone of such

utter bewilderment that Queenie nearly laughed.

'He seemed almost as astonished as you are, and tried by every means in his power to dissuade me. He said it was absurd to throw away myself and my talents on a village school, that——'

'He was right, of course,' returned Garth, interrupting her; 'we must do better for you than this, Miss Marriott; the scheme cannot be entertained for a moment. Why, our schoolmistress has only forty pounds a year! We might make it fifty, perhaps; but for a lady— He is right; it is too absurd.'

'Hush! please do not make up your mind that it is impossible. I have set my heart upon this, ever since I came; and Cathy told me the schoolmistress was gone. I want it for Emmie's sake, because she must have country air, and we cannot be separated. We would rather starve on a crust together than be separated,' continued Queenie, speaking with feverish energy, and the tears springing to her eyes.

'But, Miss Marriott---'

'But, Mr. Clayton, you must listen to me, please. I have no such grand prospects before me; a junior teacher in a school cannot command a high salary. If I went back to Carlisle it would only be drudgery over again, with no

No; you must hear me,' silencing him as he attempted to speak: 'this is a wiser plan than you think. have forty pounds a year of my own, it is nothing very great, but it all helps; and then I might give French lessons to Mrs. Morris's children in the evening. Cathy says Mrs. Morris is so anxious for them to have lessons; she and I were awake half the night planning it, and Cathy said---'

'Well, what did she say?' as Queenie paused.

'That I must speak to you and Mr. Logan, and that you would be sure to help me. There is that little cottage of Captain Fawcett's to be let; we were looking at it yesterday. Do you think it would be very dear?' asked Queenie anxiously. 'It would do so nicely for Emmie and me, if the rent were not too high.'

'Do you mean that ramshackle wilderness of a cottage

just fronting the lane?'

'Yes; it would be very pretty if it were only freshened

up a little, and the garden put in order.'

'Well, it might not be so bad,' returned Garth reluctantly. 'Rents are not very high here; I daresay Fawcett would let you have it for about fifteen pounds a year, and do it up properly besides. Let me see, there was some furniture belonging to it, that will go for a mere song."

'I forgot about the furniture,' owned Queenie candidly. 'We must be content with very little at first, just a table and a few chairs or so. I have only a few pounds to spare, but Caleb would advance me the rest. Fifteen pounds a year! do you really think that Captain Fawcett will let the cottage to us for that?'

'I can answer for it, certainly he will. You can leave that part to me; you need not distress yourself about that little matter of detail; as far as that goes I can promise to secure your election to-morrow. All I want to know is, if

you be serious in this matter?'

- 'Mr. Clayton, how can you ask me such a question?'
- 'I call it a monstrous notion.'
- 'Then we will not argue about it at all.'
- 'Impracticable and absurd to the last degree. heavens, Miss Marriott!' flinging back his head with a gesture of mingled excitement and wrath, 'have you no

friend or relative to stand by you, and prevent you from throwing yourself away on this miserable pittance?

'I have one very good friend, but he is poor,' returned the girl, and then she sighed. Something in Garth's manner—his assumed roughness, his suppressed wrath, the sudden break and softening of his voice as he uttered his short remonstrance—touched and yet pained her. What would it be to have a brother to work for her when she needed support, a strong arm that could protect her in times of emergency!

Poor self-reliant Queenie felt her bravery oozing out. A pang of self-pity suddenly crossed her as she pictured the future. Would it always be work and drudgery for herself and Emmie? must she for ever go through life with this weak burthen round her neck, toiling, toiling, with the child's feeble hand in hers?

'Friends will not be wanting to us; Heaven helps those who help themselves,' she cried with a clasp of her hands and another involuntary sigh. 'I am not afraid—not often, I mean. I prayed for work; and now work has come, and I do not mean to shrink from it. I hope you and your sisters will not be ashamed of knowing me when I am only a village schoolmistress. Are you sure you will not mind—for your sisters, I mean?' turning on him a little anxiously.

'Do you think such a question deserves an answer?' somewhat reproachfully. 'You do not know us yet, Miss Marriott. We shall honour you more in your poverty and independence than if you came amongst us rolling in wealth. Rich people are my abhorrence, women especially. Agur's prayer—"Give me neither poverty nor riches"—always pleased me. I am an odd fellow, and have my hobbies and fads like other men—this is one of them.'

'It is a very comfortable one, as far as I am concerned. Then you will promise to help me with your influence with Mr. Logan and Captain Fawcett?'

'I suppose I must, if you will let me have my grumble out first. Recollect, I enter my remonstrance; I do not approve of your scheme in the least.'

'You have made me understand that most fully.'

'I denounce it as moral suicide.'

'I call that exaggeration.'

'You are burying yourself alive under a mistaken notion of self-sacrifice; and, mark my words, I am no true prophet it you do not live to repent it.'

'On the contrary, I intend to be very happy. Cathy is going to help me with my garden, and we mean to read

German together.'

'I hope you will allow your friends to subscribe for your funeral if the crust should prove not quite so sufficing as you

imagine ?'

You need not fear anything so tragic; Emmie and I mean to flourish on our crusts as much as Daniel and the three children did on their pulse and water,' returned Queenie gaily, whose spirits had risen now her formidable task was achieved. 'I shall speak to them both to-morrow, and get it off my mind,' she had said to Cathy the previous night, when they had discussed the grand question in all its bearings, under cover of the summer darkness, and with the scent of Langley's roses steeping the air. 'There is no time to be lost; Mr. Logan is writing to Carlisle for a mistress, and I must speak to him at once.'

Queenie's buoyancy had returned, but Garth remained silent. He had done his duty, and uttered his protest against this monstrous scheme, which, nevertheless, he was bound to

further by all means in his power.

'Quixotic, absurd, girlish to the last degree,' he muttered to himself, and yet he felt he respected and liked the girl all the better for her modest independence. Two days ago they had been strangers, and now they had entered on a mutual league of friendship and support. 'I have promised to see you through this, so you may leave all business details to me,' he said with a little condescension, which, in spite of everything, amused Queenie. 'Half-measures are not in my line; if you want help from me you will be sure to get it,' finished Garth; and Queenie felt amused and grateful in a breath.

Garth was a little silent after this; the young man felt an odd thrill, half painful and half pleasant, at the recognition of this new responsibility. This young stranger had unconsciously thrown herself upon his protection. In asking his advice she had appealed strongly to his generosity. To be sure, Queenie would not have read matters in this light, indeed, would have rebelled at such a statement; but Garth judged otherwise. Tenderness to all weakness was inherent in his nature; women, children, and animals always trusted themselves involuntarily to him; his shoulders were broad enough to incur a mass of responsibility that would have crushed most people. 'It was Garth's chief happiness to help people,' his sisters always said. True, he must help them in his own way, and they must submit to his good-natured dictates, flavoured a little arbitrarily perhaps; but his sympathy and ready help would always be forthcoming. No one ever appealed to Garth Clayton's generosity in vain.

He was silent for a long time after this, revolving all sorts of schemes for the sisters' benefit. Once or twice, as she sat beside him, he glanced at her with kindly scrutiny. 'She was not much like a village schoolmistress,' he thought, as he noted the quiet, refined face, the pretty figure, the brown dress enlivened with the knot of white rosebuds, the hat with the pheasant's plume. 'Where has she picked up that air of finish and elegance? it struck me from the first. suppose some fellows would give anything to be in my place,' thought the young philosopher, a little elated, and yet puzzled at his own position. 'She is very unlike Dora, quite a contrast; they are neither of them pretty, at least not strictly Dora is the more attractive, but Miss Marriott's eyes are wonderful; I never saw any in the least like them, not that I concern myself about such matters,' finished the patriarch of eight and twenty, pulling his moustache with an amused air.

But for all that he roused himself rather reluctantly as Cathy and Mr. Logan came towards them, dragging a large basket of ferns between them. Cathy looked hot and flushed, and just a trifle perturbed. She left her hold of the basket a little impatiently, and flung herself down by Queenie.

'How provokingly cool you two look. Here have Ted and I been working like galley-slaves, until Mr. Logan chose to come and break in on our work.'

'She was overtiring herself, so I took away the trowel,' returned Mr. Logan, with an expression of quiet humour.

'Moderation in everything, Miss Catherine even in fernhunting. St. Paul's rule is the best.'

'I like to be my own taskmaster,' grumbled Cathy, who seemed to be in one of her impracticable moods. 'Queen, for pity's sake come with me for a run across the moor. I have been so long with Miss Faith and Mr. Logan that I shall have a "break out" directly, as the prison matron calls it, unless I associate for a little with less desperately good people. Moderation even in this is the best rule,' continued Cathy aggravatingly, drawing up her graceful figure, and darting a defiant look at Mr. Logan. 'After all, St. Paul was right; so come along, Queenie.'

'Kitty, what has put you into such a bad temper?' asked her friend affectionately, linking her arm in the girl's as they

crossed the tramway.

'I don't know; he treats me like a child, and I will not bear it. He puts me in one of my tantrums, and then pities and drives me wild with that gentle way of his. I hate to feel so ashamed of myself, and he knows it.'

'But what is it all about?' asked Queenie, a little be-

wildered at this sudden storm.

'Oh, I don't know, I never do know, that is just the aggravating part. I say something in my usual way, and then he puts me down and argues with me, and proves that he is right and I am wrong; and then when I get cross,—and human nature won't bear such an amount of contradiction, at least mine won't,—he just says I am tired, and takes away my trowel. I know all the time he is laughing at me in his quiet way, and saying to himself, "that poor foolish child."

'But, Cathy, there is no harm in that.'

'There is harm when I am no child, when I do not feel like one, when—but I won't talk about it any more. Let us have a race, Queen—one—two—three—away,' and Cathy flew down the moor with a swift, birdlike movement, her small head erect, but not before Queenie had caught the gleam of something like a tear on one long eyelash.

Just then a whistle from Garth summoned the scattered party together. The afternoon was far advanced; some evening clouds skirted the edge of the moor; the children were weary. The little engine steamed slowly towards

them, and all hands were busy in packing the hampers and baskets on the truck.

Cathy stood aside a little sulkily while the rest clambered into their places. Queenie, who was watching them, saw that Mr. Logan wanted to assist her, but Cathy would have none of his help; she was therefore a little surprised when he followed her, and seated himself persistently by their side.

'So you have not forgiven an old friend for having the best of an argument,' he said at last, after vainly trying to draw her into the conversation. Queenie had flung herself gallantly into the breach, but Cathy remained obstinately silent.

'She is tired, Christopher, my dear,' suddenly interrupted Miss Cosie's little chirping voice; 'nothing is more wearying than talking when one wants their tea, and I am sure I want mine. Mrs. Fawcett has been saying the same thing just now; there, there, we shall get it presently, I daresay, and Langley always makes such beautiful tea, as I tell her.'

'Are you tired, Miss Catherine? then I will not talk to you any more,' was the gentle reply, and Mr. Logan quietly

turned his attention to Queenie.

The waggonettes were waiting for them at the entrance of the Warstdale works, and a short drive deposited them at the dark porch of Church-Stile House.

Mr. Logan was standing apart for a moment under the sycamore trees, when Cathy suddenly walked up to him. The girl's cheek was crimson, her eyes were still a little defiant. 'Miss Cosie was wrong, I was not tired. I let you believe what was not true. I was only vexed and put out with myself, as I often am,' wrinkling her smooth brow and speaking quickly.

'I am always sure to hear the truth at last from you, Miss Catherine,' he replied, with a kind look and smile, as he held out his hand to her; and then Cathy sprang away into the

house.

# CHAPTER XVI

### FAITH AND CHARITY

'That thou may'st pray for them thy foes are given;
That thou may'st look to God I bring thee pain.
I bring thee cares that thou may'st look to heaven;
I bring thee fretful friends that thou may'st train
Thy soul to patience. What thou deemest gain
When closest wreathing chains around thy soul
I rend from thine own bleeding heart in twain,
That He who bought may have thy spirit whole,
Spurs that may give thee pain, but urge thee to the goal.'
KEBLE.

THE evening festivities had been closed as usual by the family concert, during which Garth had distinguished himself with more than ordinary brilliancy.

Queenie had been a little thoughtful and absent, but she had no idea that her preoccupation had been observed until she bade Garth good-night, and he followed her into the little

hall, and lighted her candle.

'What is the use of worrying yourself over a lot of unnecessary details?' he said, looking down at her with an elder-brotherly air. 'Things can't be settled in a minute. Leave everything to me; I will see you through your difficulties. The best thing will be to put it all out of your head for a little while, until I give you leave to think of it.'

'I will try; but it will not be very easy, when so much

depends upon it,' she returned submissively.

They were standing alone together in the little square hall; a lamp burned dimly in a recess; the candle flared between them in the summer draught; a grey moth brushed round

them. Outside was the shadow of the dark sycamores. A little runlet of water trickled audibly in the silence. Garth's broad shoulders seemed to block up the tiny hall; he towered above Queenie's slim, girlish figure, looking down upon her with condescending dignity, but with the gleam of real kindness in his eyes. As he held out his hand his firm, warm pressure seemed reassuring.

'That is all the more reason to leave it to me. We business men are used to deal with difficulties. Nothing hurts me; I am strong enough to bear any amount of responsibility.' And Queenie went upstairs comforted.

Garth's assurance was not unnecessary. For some days nothing further passed between them on the subject of her project. Garth never alluded to it; and but for those few words Queenie might have felt uneasy. As it was she had some difficulty in keeping her restlessness down. It cost her an effort at times to appear unrestrained, and to join in the ordinary topics of conversation.

'I try to do as he tells me, and put it out of my mind; but it is so hard when so much depends upon it,' she would say to Cathy when they retired for the night. 'I hope it is not wrong; but I have set my heart on carrying out this scheme. I get fonder of this place every day, and so does Emmie. I never was so happy in my life!' finished Queenie, with a little sob of excitement.

'You dear old Queen! as though we ever meant to part with you! Have you really only been here a week? How I enjoy having you; and Langley says the same. Never mind Garth's silence, his few words mean more than a whole hour of talk from any other man. If he says he will do a thing you may safely trust him.'

'Yes; I know; but all the same, Mr. Logan may not think me suitable for such a post,' persisted Queenie disconsolately, 'and then I shall be obliged to go back to Carlisle, and to part with Emmie. Oh, Cathy! it does seem so hard, when we should be content with so little;' and though Cathy soothed her friend, and was very kind and sympathising, there was no denying that the cause for suspense was a grave one.

Queenie had only stated the truth when she had owned she had never been happier in her life. For the first time she had tasted the real comfort of a happy, well-regulated home. Queenie's own youth had never known freedom from the fretting cares of a narrow income and incessant burden of debt. The remembrance of the petty meanness, the shiftlessness, the continuous fight with untoward circumstance, made retrospect bitter to her. She had grown up strong and sturdy, like some solitary Alpine plant which had taken root in a handful of earth on the edge of a crevasse; the sunshine might be all about her, but it had not gilded her one point of rock.

Here there was plenty without profusion, comfort without pretension; a happy family circle, rich in individuality, characteristic, strong in will, with a fount of pure native humour evidently engrained in the blood; and yet there were fewer jars and less dissensions than ordinarily occur in domestic life.

Ted was evidently the malcontent of the household; but even his grumbling, incessant as it was, had no root of bitterness in it. He was only a lazy, sweet-tempered fellow, who had not yet fitted himself to his niche in life, and who was young enough to quarrel with the monotony of his existence. 'Look here! I can't stand this much longer; I shall have to cut it, after all, and take to office work in Carlisle,' he would say, when he had secured the two girls as listeners, and had extended himself after his usual fashion on the long, narrow couch, with his arms under his head, and his light hair standing on end. 'Do you think a fellow of any spirit can endure life in a hole like this?'

'Oh, Ted, do be quiet; we are so tired of this sort of talk,' remonstrated his sister.

'I am not talking to you; I am talking to Miss Marriott. She is a girl of sense, and knows what a fellow means when he says he is hipped, and all that. Do you think a place like Hepshaw is meant for anything but a refuge for old maids?'

'Oh, Teddie, you rude boy!'

'Don't interfere, Catherine; I am speaking to your betters.'

'Your brother seems perfectly content with his surroundings; I should advise you to follow his example,' returned

Queenie demurely, trying hard not to laugh, and not unmindful of the boyish kicks that were being administered to the end of the sofa.

'Garth! Oh, he is different; he is a confirmed old bachelor, a sort of philosopher on a small scale. believe Garth would trouble himself if he never saw a fresh face from one year's end to another. A man with a hobby is always to be envied,' sighed the poor victim of circumstance.

'Get a hobby, then,' snapped Cathy.

'Oh, it is all very easy to talk.'

'I know it is, or you would not lie railing there, like the melancholy Jacques, against fate. "I met a fool," quoth he, "a motley fool."

"Call me not fool till heaven hath sent me fortune," growled Ted, with the spirit of reviving fun in his eyes.

'There, he is better now; when he begins to quote we may safely leave him, Queenie. I want you to come with me and call on the Cardinal Virtues; it is such a wet afternoon that they will be in strong force. Never mind Ted's grumbling, he cannot expect you to stay at home and talk to him; besides, he has David Copperfield to amuse him.'

'I'll pay you out for this,' returned her brother viciously. 'Just as Miss Marriott and I had found out we were kindred spirits, and all that sort of thing.

'Oh, woman! in your hour of ease A wretched bore, or else a tease; When pain and sickness wring the brow A downright duffer then art thou.'

Wasn't the old Caledonian one when he praised up the weaker portion of the community in that ridiculous fashion?' but as Cathy did not condescend to reply, the passage of arms

stopped.

The sisterhood were all gathered in the pleasant parlour at the Evergreens. A bright-eyed, faded little woman lay on the couch in the bay window knitting some bright-coloured strips for an antimacassar. She looked up and nodded pleasantly as the friends entered.

'You always come to us on a wet afternoon, Catherine. when visitors are most welcome. Faith was reading to us: I daresay she will be glad of a rest by this time. We are in the fourth volume of D'Aubigné's Reformation. Put a marker in the place, Faith, and then we shall lose no time when we open the book again. Do you know D'Aubigné, Miss Marriott? it is most improving reading for young people.'

'Could this active-looking, talkative little woman be the hopeless invalid of whom she had heard so much?' Queenie asked herself, with some bewilderment, as she sat down in the comfortable chair that Miss Faith brought to her. Though it was summer a little fire burned in the grate; the window had been closed to exclude the dampness. Miss Faith's cheeks looked unusually pale; her eyes were full of a soft weariness.

'Charity is so fond of D'Aubigné; I think he tires me a little. It is very good reading, of course; but in this summer weather, and with the drip, drip of the rain on the leaves——'

'There were giants in those days,' broke in Miss Hope vigorously. 'Luther was a grand man, and so was Zwingle.' Miss Hope spoke in a loud but not unpleasing voice. She was a stout, fresh-coloured woman, not without a certain degree of comeliness. In her young days she had been too high-coloured for beauty, but now the grey hair toned and softened her down.

Miss Prudence was less pleasing: she was tall and angular, wore spectacles, and had that slight appendage on the upper lip which is not a strictly feminine adjunct. Her voice was thin in quality and somewhat harsh. Queenie felt that Ted's soubriquet of 'the dragon' was not badly bestowed. It was she who held the purse-strings of the little household, and who guarded the proprieties. Miss Hope, in spite of her strong leaning to the Plymouth Brothers, and her somewhat injudicious tyrannies in the matter of temperance and total abstinence, was far less rigid than her strong-minded sister.

No wonder Miss Faith drooped in such an atmosphere! and then Miss Charity's voice! Queenie, who was sensitive on such matters, found fault with the ceaseless flow of words that proceeded from the bay-window. 'She is egotistical, selfish; she works that poor sister of hers to death, I know she does,' thought the girl to herself, with a certain youthful antagonism against oppression. 'Miss Faith is a saint; but I wonder how she can bear it.'

Queenie was a little hard in her judgment, as young people often are in their estimate of things and people. There was selfishness, and possibly oppression, in the continual sisterly sacrifice demanded as a right; in the unpitying claims made on the health and time so ungrudgingly bestowed upon her.

In life, real life, we see these sort of sacrifices perpetually exacted before our eyes. Human flesh and blood revolts against the sight. The strong, sometimes the young, compelled to put away their own life, and spend some of their best years chained to the couch of helplessness; condemned to share the burthen of an invalid existence; exposed to petty tyrannies and tempers, and bearing them out of pity for the suffering that provokes them.

Sometimes, indeed, it may be a labour of love, a life within a life, of many-folded sweetnesses blossoming out of the pain, as in the case of an afflicted parent or husband. There are many women who lead pattern lives of sisterly or filial devotion. Yet are there sadder cases, when duty and not love is the mainspring of action; when the self-sacrifice is bitter though voluntary; when the watcher would willingly change places with the watched, that the bounding pulse of health might be subdued; that the keen suffering of repression and yearning, and God only knows what bitter measure of woman's pain, might be dulled and quieted by mere bodily weakness.

To be free, only to be free, and live their own lives—that is what some women vainly crave; and then a stone is given them for bread. Instead of work comes waiting—the hardest and most trying form of work; instead of freedom a mesh of finely-woven duties, light as gossamer threads, yet binding the conscience like cart-ropes.

Queenie sat and mused with inward rebellion while Charity talked about her books, and showed her manuscript volumes of finely-copied extracts. 'I always write out passages that please me; it is such a resource to read them afterwards. I want Faith to do the same, but she likes mending and watering her flowers. I prefer thoughts to flowers, Miss Marriott,'

'Every one has a right to their taste. I think I share Miss Faith's,' returned the girl, a little ungraciously. She felt no pity for the bright-eyed, faded little woman, who made so much of her life, and hid away her sufferings bravely, much as the silk patched coverlet hid the useless shrunken limbs.

She would not even allow to Cathy that she could have ever been pretty, as they walked home together through the summer rain.

'Her face does not attract me in the least, there is nothing in it; and then her cheek-bones are so high, and her curls are so thin and limp. Now, if she only braided them nicely under a little close cap—and then her tongue; oh, Cathy! I think she would drive me distracted in a week.'

But Cathy stood up stoutly for Miss Charity.

- 'I must say that I think you a little prejudiced,' she returned, with honest indignation, and that natural love of opposition that incites young people to do battle for the accused. She did not love Miss Charity in the least; but, nevertheless, her sense of justice prompted her to take up her defence. 'She is nice-looking now, every one says so; and when she was young she was more than pretty, positively beautiful, before she met with her accident.'
  - 'Was it an accident that caused her illness?'
- 'Yes; she was a strong healthy girl, just like us, freshcoloured and blooming; and her hair used to be so pretty,—
  it was just that lovely tinge of gold that one sees with fair
  complexions, and now the colour seems all faded out of it. She
  used to be called the pretty Miss Palmer; and then she was
  the only one of the four sisters who was ever engaged.'
- 'Oh, Cathy, I thought you told me that there was no one for them to marry!'
- 'I forgot Miss Charity's affair; she was engaged to a young farmer in Wythiedale. I fancy he was a rough-and-ready sort of person; but I believe she was fond of him, poor thing, and then her accident happened.'
  - 'What sort of accident?'
- 'Oh, she fell down the granary steps when she was spending the day at his father's. It was a dreadful affair; partial paralysis set in, and there was a complication and a great deal of suffering; and then the doctor said it was hopeless, and she was obliged to give him up.'
- 'Oh, poor Miss Charity!' ejaculated Queenie, with tears in her eyes. She could have gone back and asked her

pardon on the spot for all the hard things she had thought. 'I never dreamt of trouble like this; I can hardly bear to hear of it. What became of the poor fellow?'

'That is the worst part of all,' replied Cathy, rather reluctantly; 'his end was very miserable. He broke his neck when he was out hunting. His horse fell, in trying to jump a five-barred gate, and rolled over on him. Some people said he was not quite sober when it happened. Whether he grew reckless from the loss of her, or whether, as it is strongly suspected, he was addicted to intemperance from the first, I cannot possibly tell; but I rather think that she must have been deceived in him. Of course no one was cruel enough to hint at such a thing to her; and so she treasures the memory of her poor George, as she calls him.'

'But, Cathy, what a terrible tragedy!'

'Yes; she was very ill for a time; and then Miss Faith gave up her hospital, and came home to nurse her. Of course it sounds very bad, and the poor thing has suffered a good deal one way and another; but how do you know that it was not all for the best?' finished Cathy solemnly. 'Think if that accident had never happened, and she had married him, and then found that he was not worthy. To be tied for life to a man, and then to see him sink lower and lower, to despise one's own husband! Could you imagine any greater torment than that? If it were I, I know I should get to hate him. Nothing should make me live with such a man; I would beg my bread first,' cried the girl, with sparkling eyes, and setting her small white teeth together. 'To despise one's husband! oh, Queenie, think how dreadful!'

'I don't suppose such a thing could happen to either of us. Poor Miss Charity! perhaps it was a blessing in disguise after all; but to think of caring for D'Aubigné's Reformation, and copying out all those tedious extracts, after living through such a tragedy as that! it seems so incomprehensible.'

'Do you think the sun and the moon ought to have stood still in her little firmament? don't you know hearts are broken every day, and the world goes on just as usual?' returned Cathy sententiously. She and Queenie seemed to have changed characters that afternoon; it was Cathy who was calm and philosophical. At another time her old-fashioned wisdom would have provoked a smile, but Queenie was too much in earnest.

'I should have thought her story would have been more plainly written in her face. If it had been Miss Faith now— Cathy, you look queer; has Miss Faith ever had a story too?'

'Well, not exactly. I don't know, no one does; but I always fancied there was some attraction beside the sick children in that hospital. Langley's suspicions were aroused when she went over to Carlisle once; but she would not like me to repeat such nonsense.'

'But why should I not know? Oh, Cath! there could

not be any harm in telling me.'

'Well, perhaps not, as it was ten years ago. I don't know what made Langley say such a thing, but she spoke to me once of a dark young surgeon, who came up to them in the ward, and talked to them for a long time. Langley said nothing crossed her mind until she saw him look at Miss Faith, and then, somehow, the thought got into her mind.'

'Nothing but a look?'

'My dear, there is a great deal to be read in looks,' returned Cathy demurely. 'It was just the beginning, I daresay, of a possible romance. When Miss Charity's trouble happened, and poor Miss Faith came home to nurse her, every one said it was grief at her sister's state that made her so grave and unlike herself; but Langley always believes that that dark young surgeon had something to do with it, and so do I. I daresay this was one of the "might-havebeens" that have spoiled many women's lives.'

'But Miss Faith is not so old,—only five and thirty,—and

she is still so sweet-looking.'

'My dear, we are speaking of mere looks, and ten years ago; most likely he has married and has half a dozen children by this time; and remember, they have never even met since. Perhaps he has grown stout and bald, those dark young men do get stout sometimes. I am a little cynical, but I cannot believe in such faithfulness as that. Men are such fickle creatures, my dear, "out of sight is out of mind" with most of them.'

'Pray where did you learn those abominable sentiments? asked her brother curtly, as he came up behind the girls, starting them into a muttered exclamation of dismay. How much had he overheard? how was it that his footsteps had gained upon them unperceived? Quick blushes burnt in the girls' faces. Garth shook off the raindrops and laughed mischievously; he was master of the situation, his love of teasing was paramount.

'Girls are all alike. Fancy men talking to each other about their love affairs, and choosing a public thoroughfare

for the tender confidence.'

'Garth, you are a monster, and I hate you,' burst out

Cathy, stamping her little foot at him.

'Mr. Clayton is utterly mistaken,' observed Queenie hotly; 'we were only discussing other people's affairs. We are not often in such a gossiping mood, but Cathy was communicative, and I suppose I got interested.'

'Is it also your opinion that men are such fickle creatures? I thought that was Cathy's observation. She has known so many men, and has such a wide acquaintance with life. I should have thought Miss Titheridge and the dragon-guarded portals of Granite Lodge would have excluded the stronger and ruder sex, but perhaps I am mistaken.'

'Garth, when you are in this mood I detest you.'

'I cannot have you infecting Miss Marriott's mind with such heterodox notions; fickleness is all on the other side, take my word for it. I am sorry that I only overheard the last words, as Cathy's communications would doubtless have proved both novel and instructive; a schoolgirl's opinion on such points must be delicious. Cathy, my dear, if you can spare Miss Marriott one moment I have a word or two to say to her. Step into my den there, please, while I hang up my wet coat. I will be with you in a moment.'

Queenie obeyed him wonderingly. She had been in Garth's den before, Cathy had taken her, but she looked

round it with fresh interest.

There were the bookshelves he had made and stained himself, loaded with his favourite authors - Dickens, Thackeray, and Macaulay, 'fine fellows all of them,' he would say; and his writing-table with all its old bachelor's appurtenances,—the pipe-rack and red earthen tobacco-jar; and the worn easy-chair, the shabbiest and the most comfortable in the house. Opposite was the picture of his mother, a large faded oil-painting of a woman, not young, but with a

sweet gentle face and Garth's blue-grey eyes.

Queenie looked at it for some time, and then she went to the window. A little bird was singing through the rain, the drops splashed endlessly from the white-rose bush under the window; the steep lawn planted sparsely with trees ran down to the lane. Langley's jessamine and clove-pink steeped the wet air with fragrance; a half-drowned bee clung to a spray of woodbine. 'Most people would call this dull; and how they would hate that little gate leading to the churchyard, and the thought of that granite monument shining in the moonlight, but to me it is the dearest place,' thought Queenie, leaning against the window-frame in sweet abstraction.

'Are you there, Miss Marriott? I am so sorry to have kept you waiting,' observed Garth apologetically, coming to her side in his quick way. 'Langley detained me with some questions of domestic detail that could not be postponed.'

'It does not matter, I was in no hurry. Look at that bee, Mr. Clayton; I was just going out to rescue him; he is

shipwrecked, and wants to save his cargo of honey.'

'You shall go to him by and by. I only want to say a word to you. I have talked to Mr. Logan, and everything is arranged. In a month from this time you are to enter on your new duties as mistress of the Hepshaw girls' school.'

## CHAPTER XVII

#### THE NEW SCHOOLMISTRESS

The trivial round, the common task, Would furnish all we ought to ask—Room to deny ourselves, a road
To bring us daily nearer God.'—KEBLE.

'In a month from this time you will enter on your new duties as mistress of the Hepshaw girls' school.'

Queenie gave a little start and cry of suppressed pleasure, and then the colour rushed over her face. With sudden impulse, as involuntary as it was graceful, she held out her hand to Garth.

'Oh, Mr. Clayton! how kind you are to me! Once or twice I was half afraid you had forgotten; and all the time you were quietly arranging it.'

Garth was quite equal to the occasion. He looked down at the girl's radiant face, so expressive of joy and gratitude, with warm kindliness shining in his eyes. When the slim hand was stretched out to him he held it for a moment as though it had been Cathy's. 'Oh, if he were only my brother!' sighed the girl to herself, with a little outburst of natural yearning as she felt the strong clasp.

Garth's handsome face looked almost as bright as hers. His position contented him; it was novel as well as interesting. It pleased him to throw the shield of his protection and tenderness round these young strangers, who had, in a way, appealed to his generosity. If Queenie had been old and plain he would have been just as gentle and chivalrous

in his manner to her. No woman would ever have had a rough word from Garth; but a little of the zest and flavour would have been wanting.

To read gratitude in a pair of wonderful brown eyes, that seem to have no bottom to their depth, and to feel a soft, girlish hand touch his own timidly, were new revelations to the young man, who was a philosopher, but no stoic. He remembered their expression long afterwards, and the peculiar feel of the fluttering fingers, with an odd sensation that tingled through him. 'What a contrast she is to Dora!' he thought again.

'You are very, very good to me,' continued Queenie;

but he interrupted her.

'I don't deserve half these thanks; I have done very little, after all. So you thought I had forgotten you? When you know me better,' went on Garth with good-humoured reproach, 'you will find out that I am a man of my word. When I say I will do a thing you may be sure that if it be in my power it will be done.'

'I was not so unjust as to doubt you,' returned Queenie humbly, 'only as the days went on I lost hope. I thought you had failed in persuading Mr. Logan, and did not like

to tell me.'

'I hope I never shrink from any duty, however unpleasant; procrastination is only for cowards. I should certainly have told you at once, Miss Marriott. But now for these miserable details,' continued Garth, changing his grave tone into a lighter one. 'So you will persist in thinking it a matter of congratulation that you are to be our future school-mistress?'

'Certainly.'

'It is not a very desirable post; indeed, it is quite beneath your acceptance. You cannot think how strongly Mr. Logan and I feel on that point. As the Vicar's churchwarden I had a right to take my own ground in the matter, and we have arranged that your future stipend shall be fifty pounds a year. More than this is out of our power,' continued Garth, stammering a little, and for the first time becoming slightly embarrassed. 'There is not even a dwelling-house or lodging attached to the salary; but the Vicar wishes, that is—'

corrected Garth, feeling himself on the edge of a very decided fib, and slightly daunted by the look in Queenie's eyes.

'You are not going to offer me more than my fair salary?' returned the girl, drawing up her head with a sudden gesture of pride he had never seen in her before, and her voice sounded clear and decided. 'You told Mr. Logan, of course, that this was impossible? I will work; but I will not be beholden to him or any other man for a penny more than I have honestly earned. Forty, not fifty, pounds was the sum you named to me in the quarry.'

'Don't be contumacious, Miss Marriott,' returned Garth, with an amused look; but on the whole he rather liked the girl's independence than otherwise; it accorded with his own notions. He had held these sentiments all his life, and it was his chief pride that he had never been beholden to his fellows for anything that he could not justly claim. 'Pride, independence, were necessary adjuncts to manhood,' so Garth thought; 'but in a woman, perhaps, they might be made to yield under the pressure of emergency.'

'I will only take what belongs to me,' she continued

obstinately.

'Then that will be fifty pounds a year. Listen to me, please,' as she again attempted to speak. 'I am the Vicar's warden, and have a right to use my authority in this affair. I have always considered that our mistresses are underpaid; I intend to fix the salary from this time at the sum I named. Mr. Logan and Captain Fawcett, our remaining trustee, agree to this; so,' finished Garth, with a persuasive smile, 'it is signed, sealed, and delivered, and only wants your consent.'

Queenie bowed her head gravely, and with a little dignity. She was sharp-witted enough to see that Garth had not said all he intended, that something perilous to her pride lay folded on the edge of that fib; something that, with the kindest intentions in the world, would have wounded her sus-

ceptibility and hurt her.

'Then there is nothing more to say?' rather stiffly.

'Do these details weary you? They are very necessary,' he returned, with a frank kindness that disarmed her at once. 'If you fill this position it is better to understand everything thoroughly. You still think that, with the little you have, and

the chance of giving lessons in the evening, you will be able to live upon the proceeds of so small a salary? There is your little sister, remember, Miss Marriott.'

'We have learned to do without things, and to be content with very little; it will be enough, thank you,' returned

the girl quietly.

'Then in that case I can only wish you success on your undertaking. Your duties will not be so very arduous. The hours are from nine to twelve in the morning, and from two to four in the afternoon. The schoolhouse is a miserable sort of place, a compromise between a barn and a small dissenting chapel. You are not so fortunate as Mr. Miles; the boys' schoolhouse is a much handsomer and more commodious building.'

'I have seen him, have I not?' asked Queenie, somewhat

curiously.

'Perhaps, but it is holiday time, and he always goes down to his brother in Wales. He is a very pleasant sort of fellow, though rather an oddity; is slightly lame, plays on the violin, and is an inveterate smoker. He is a man of good education, and has been usher in two or three first-class schools. He had fair hopes of rising in the world until he met with his accident. For the misanthrope he professes to be he is one of the cheeriest sort possible. He lodges over the post-office; Mrs. Dawes thinks a great deal of him.'

'Have you no doctor here?' inquired Queenie, with a sudden

remembrance of Miss Charity.

Garth shook his head gravely. 'Ah! poor Dr. Morgan is dead; he died the week before you came. He is a loss to us all, poor old fellow! He lived in the corner house, next Mrs. Morris; and,' with a smile breaking round the corners of his mouth, 'remained a bachelor all his life in spite of her. But a truce to this sort of gossip; that would just suit Cathy. I have spoken to Captain Fawcett about letting Brierwood Cottage to you, and he is perfectly willing to do so. The rent is fifteen pounds a year; but, as he justly says, it is quite unfit for human habitation at the present—the floors want mending, and there is some papering and whitewashing to be done.'

'The cottage is really to be mine?' she exclaimed breathlessly.

'It is yours from this present moment if you like, though you will not enter into legal possession for six weeks. You must put up with our society for that time. I shall take the liberty of sending Nathan over to trim the grass and weeds, unless you are particularly partial to docks, Miss Marriott.'

'Thank you, you are very good; but,' hesitating, and looking up in his face in some perplexity, 'I shall have to go over to Carlisle. I must speak to Mr. Runciman, about the furniture, you know; we shall want very little, Emmie and I, at least, only a few chairs and a bed and a table. Do you think ten pounds will go far? One must buy a few things, but I am so ignorant of prices,' cried poor Queenie, feeling all at once very helpless and womanish, and hoping that he would not laugh at her ignorance.

Garth could not help feeling amused at the girl's naïvelé, but he was quite ready for the emergency, having already settled it all with Langley. 'If she be very independent we can manage it best in this way,' he had said to his sister.

'One must have chairs and tables; well, and a few other things. There must be blankets for winter, and cooking utensils,' continued Garth, with charming frankness. 'Langley knows better than I about such matters, and by and by we will get her to draw up a list. Langley has a splendid head for details. There is a second-hand lot of things going off in a few days' time. You can leave Langley and me to manage it.'

'Yes; but the money; there will only be about ten or twelve pounds that Miss Titheridge sent me back at the last. She said she owed it to us, but it was only her conscience that pricked her, I know.'

'You must keep that for present expenses, as you cannot draw your salary beforehand,' he returned promptly. 'I will tell you what we will do: Langley shall invest in these few articles for you,—we shall pick them up cheaply, you know—and you shall repay her by instalments, just a small sum quarterly as you can spare it. Langley shall have a regular debtor and creditor account. Nothing need offend your independence, Miss Marriott.'

'No; but it is too kind, much, much too kind,' she returned,

hesitating. 'And how do I know when I may be able to

repay it?'

'In two years' time at the furthest,' he returned cheerfully.
'I only look upon it as a safe investment for Langley's

money.'

'Owe no man anything, but to love one another,' suddenly came into Queenie's mind. Was she fastening a load of debt round her neck? would she ever be able to pay it back? was not this another kindly ruse to afford her help?

She looked up quickly, almost suspiciously, but the grey eyes that watched her were honest and straightforward. He would not press benefits on her that he felt would be repugnant. No: she was sure of that.

Garth answered her unspoken thought, flushing slightly,

as though her mute appeal touched him.

'I am sure you will be able to repay us; we will do all in our power to help you to do so.' Then, after a moment's hesitation: 'I feel just as you do about these sort of things. I like to help myself, and not to be dependent on other people. Believe me, Miss Marriott, I think far too highly of your independence, and respect you too much to offer you

any help that you could not accept.'

'Then I will trust you,' returned Queenie in a low tone. She spoke upon impulse. It cost her a momentary pang, as though she felt some cold weight suddenly settling down on her; and after all, what could she do? Caleb could not help them, at least not much. Emmie and she could not dwell between four bare walls. What was there for her but to accept the kindly advance so gracefully hidden under Langley's name—Langley and Cathy, who had not a sixpence of their own, as Cathy once somewhat triumphantly informed her? 'It is Garth who buys everything for us, dear old fellow, and pays all our bills, after grumbling over them,' she said once.

'I assure you, you will never repent the trust,' he answered, so gravely that Queenie feared he was hurt by her reluctance, until the old bright smile came back to reassure her. 'Then this grand matter is settled, and we will go and talk to

Langley.'

Emmie was almost wild with joy when she heard the news. The sensitive little creature burst into a perfect passion of tears, as she clung to her sister's neck, trembling with such excitement that Queenie was frightened.

'Oh, Queenie, is it really, really true that we are going to live in that little cottage, you and I together, like the sisters in story-books?' she exclaimed over and over again.

'Yes, yes; once upon a time there were two sisters one of them was handsome and the other ugly,' interrupted Cathy briskly.

'The handsome one was my Queen then, she drops diamonds and roses every time she speaks; I am the little ugly duck-

ling they called me at Miss Titheridge's.'

'Nonsense,' returned Cathy abruptly, kissing the little pale face, as she spoke somewhat hurriedly. There was still a weird, unchildlike look about Emmie—the blue eyes were still too bright and large, the cheeks too thin and hollow, but the little rings of yellow hair were beginning to curl prettily over the temples. 'Remember the ugly duckling turned into the beautiful swan at last.'

'Oh, I don't want beauty; Queenie is welcome to it all. I shall have it some day in heaven, there is no ugliness there, you know,' moralised the child in her strange oldfashioned way. A sudden mist rose to her sister's eyes as she spoke, the graceful fancies of the old fairy tale dissolved, and in its place came an overwhelming vision of a whiterobed multitude, beatific with youth, and endowed with angelic beauty.

There is no ugliness there; no, little Emmie, no ugliness because no sin, no weariness of a diseased and worn-out body, no gloom of an over-tempted and troubled mind; for in the new heavens and the new earth God will see that

everything there also is very good.

They were sitting together on the low window-seat of the room that the sisters occupied; and Cathy had come in, with her long black hair floating over her shoulders, to chat over her friend's new prospects. It was one of those quiet, calm summer nights, when a 'peace be still' seems whispered from God's universe; a white crescent moon hung in the dark blue sky, bright facets of gold glimmered here and there, the dark sycamores hardly stirred in the faint breeze, the tombstones shone in the pure white light; below them the church stood in dark shadow.

'I like this better than our old garret,' whispered Emmie.
'I am so fond of that churchyard, Cathy; I like it better than Mrs. Fawcett's garden. I like to lie in bed and think of the real people who are buried there, and wonder what they were like when they walked and talked as we are doing. The world seems so full of dead and living people somehow.'

'Talking of churchyards always makes me shiver,' returned Cathy, exchanging a meaning glance with her friend. Emmie was not always quite canny, she thought. 'I would rather talk about Queenie's new cottage, and all the fun we mean to have there. I shall come to tea nearly every night, and in the winter you and I will toast muffins, Emmie, and roast chestnuts. I think I must give you one of my Persian kittens, since you have left yours at Carlisle; no cottage is complete without a cat on the hearth.

'But, Cathy,' remonstrated her friend, 'I am afraid there will be little time for fun of any sort. There will be French lessons to give on two or three evenings in the week; and by and by there will be Emmie to teach, and our clothes to mend, and then, as we can only afford a girl to clean up and do the rough work, I shall have to teach myself cooking. And, oh dear, the day will never be long enough for all I shall have to do,' sighed poor Queenie, all at once oppressed by a sense of her future work.

'Do you suppose that I shall sit down with folded hands and see you slave yourself to death in that fashion?' returned Cathy in an aggrieved voice, 'is that your notion of friendship, you disagreeable old Queen? You will have teaching enough with the village children and Mrs. Morris's seven little hopes; you may make up your mind just to leave Emmie to me.'

'But that is nonsense. What would Langley say to such a proposal?'

Langley is charmed at the notion; we settled it between us this morning. Emmie is to come and do her lessons with me every morning, and her music with Langley. I shall make a firstrate governess, my dear Madam Dignity; and, mimicking Langley's soft serious voice, 'think what a grand

thing it will be not to let my acquirements rust, but to turn them to solid account!' Then with a burst of her old vivacity, 'Think what a blessing you and Emmie will be to me! you will give me occupation, and prevent my dying of ennui in this millpond of existence, as Ted calls it.'

Queenie's eyes looked unutterable things, but she only said, 'Oh, Cathy, Cathy, how can I ever repay all your

goodness ?'

'Goodness to myself, you mean. I will tell you what we will do, Queen: we will coax Langley to let us go into the kitchen and take regular lessons from Susan; it will be rather hot work this weather, but we will go through the furnace of affliction together. You are beginning house-keeping on rather a small scale, my poor dear; but to live we must eat, and to eat I fear we require a certain amount of ingredients, concerning the price and the cooking of which I fear we are profoundly ignorant.'

'Yes, indeed,' returned her friend ruefully.

'This must be rectified at once. What a blessing you are to me. I was sighing for new worlds to conquer, and now frying-pans and mending open a new scope for my feminine talents. How I used to envy those Israelitish women when I was at school.'

'You used to be very cross on darning afternoons,' put in Emmie.

'I am afraid I was. Think of one's clothes never wearing out for forty years! it was enough to reconcile them to the wilderness. I should not be surprised if I rather liked it now. Suppose we take lessons in patching from Miss Faith?'

'I must help too,' broke in the child eagerly. 'I can mend quite neatly now, Cathy; and I will weed the garden, and grow radishes, and mustard, and cress, and sweep up the hearth, and put on the kettle for Queenie when she comes home tired. Oh, I wish Caleb and Molly would come and live with us, and that we could all be happy together.'

'Caleb would not like to leave Carlisle, or Molly either;

you must be content with me, and only me.

'My dears,' interrupted Langley's quiet voice from the door, 'it is nearly eleven, and these night dews are not wholesome for the child; let me beg you to close the window,

and leave off talking; ' and thus admonished, the little party broke up somewhat hurriedly.

Queenie had interviews with Mr. Logan and Captain

Fawcett the next day.

'Well, Miss Marriott, so you are to be my tenant for Brierwood Cottage,' he said, stopping to speak to her, as they encountered each other in the lane. 'My wife was so glad to get the little lassie for a neighbour, that you might almost have made your own terms with us.'

'You are very kind not to put difficulties in my way, and the rent is so small that I think we can afford it. It will be quieter than lodgings, and more to ourselves; but it sounds rather ambitious, a home of our own,' returned the girl, with a little thrill of excitement. Poor as it was it would be home.

'Suppose we go and have a look at it,' proposed Captain Fawcett in his curt, businesslike way. 'It is in miserable need of repairs, I know; that last tenant of mine let it go to rack and ruin. I will go over to Hargrave's and get the key. Oh, there's the Vicar crossing over to speak to you; I can safely leave you with him a minute.'

'I must shake hands with my new schoolmistress,' said Mr. Logan, beaming on her through his spectacles. 'So you have talked us all over, and got your own way; well, well, everything is for the best, of course; but to have a young lady, a clergyman's daughter too, teaching in that crazy little

building yonder is a strange sight to me.'

'I shall not be above my work; you will have no reason to repent your decision,' returned the girl firmly, but

modestly.

'Well said, my dear young lady, "who sweeps a room." You know what our excellent Herbert says, "It is the motive that ennobles the work." I am glad to see you remember that.'

'I mean my work to ennoble me,' replied Queenie, her face glowing with the thought. 'It does not matter that the building is poor, and the children some of them rough and uncultivated; it is a grand work to teach young minds, and to watch their progress, and get interested in their lives. It may tire one a little at times,' she continued candidly.

'but it is not mere drudgery and nothing else. Oh, Mr. Logan, say you are pleased to have me; it will give me heart

and courage to hear you say so.'

'Pleased! I am more glad than I can say,' returned the Vicar, with a look that Queenie did not quite read, but which touched her greatly, it was at once so keen and gentle. 'God bless both the work and worker. Oh, here comes the Captain; perhaps when you have looked over your new abode you may like to see the inside of the schoolhouse?'

'We will all walk down together,' interposed the Captain.
'Come along, Miss Marriott; don't keep the Vicar waiting.'

Queenie followed the two gentlemen silently. A strange sensation woke in her as she crossed the threshold. She had closed the first chapter of her existence. Here was a new life waiting for her to take up; it would be lived out underneath this humble roof. The past lay shrouded away, hidden like a dead hand out of sight. What would the future hold for her and Emmie?

She followed them silently from room to room, as Captain Fawcett made his brief, businesslike comments. The damp cozed from the corners, long lengths of soiled paper trailed from the walls, the boards creaked under their footfall, the scurry of tiny feet and the squeak of mice sounded behind the wainscot, docks and nettles peeped in at the begrimed windows. Queenie shivered slightly.

'We will alter all this,' exclaimed Captain Fawcett, turning briskly round on her, and pulling at his grey moustache. 'This damp mouldiness is enough to make any one shiver; a little paint and a few coats of whitewash, and a fresh paper or two, will make a different thing of it.'

'I was not thinking of the damp,' returned Queenie in a low voice; and then she went and stood by herself at the window, looking up the ridge of ragged grass that lay like a steep little wilderness behind the house. It was the newness and the strangeness of her surroundings that oppressed her. 'To have a house of one's own, that is the strangest part of all,' she thought.

She was still silent as she walked down the village street. One or two of the women at the cottage doors stood and looked after them curiously; but at the sight of the quaint



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edifice, with its half-moon windows, Queenie's youthful energy revived.

She walked in, head erect, as the gentlemen made way for her, and stood before the old wooden desks, and looked at the half-dozen forms before her. It was a small square room, well, but not cheerfully, lighted; the windows set so high in the walls that no signs of the outer world could distract the attention of the little students.

'This small inner room is for the infants,' explained Mr. Logan, coming round to her side; 'it is a very humble affair, you see.'

'Yes; but it is my work,' returned Queenie, facing round on them with a quiver of excitement. 'My work, and my life, and no other's, and I mean to do the best with both of them that I can.'

Some one stooping his high head at the door cried softly 'Amen' to himself.

It was Garth Clayton.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### DORA

'Woman-kind, Whom all men ought, both young and old, defend with all their might; Considering what they do deserve of every living wight.'—MORE.

THE next week or two passed pleasantly and quickly. The girls adhered rigidly to their course of self-improvement, despite the temptation afforded by summer days. During the fresh morning hours they remained closely shut up in kitchen or pantry, busied in all sorts of mysteries connected with the culinary art, appearing at the early dinner with flushed tired faces and slightly dishevelled hair. All sorts of telegraphic communications passed between them and Langley. Garth, who was not in the secret, and who was a somewhat fastidious as well as abstemious man, was a little perplexed by Susan's vagaries, as he termed them.

'What has come to the woman, Langley?' he would say. 'She has always been the best bread-maker in Hepshaw, but this last batch is almost uneatable, it is so heavy and sad. Her pies last night were disgraceful, and now this joint is under-done.'

'I will speak to her,' Langley would answer quietly, while the girls interchanged looks of confusion and dismay. Queenie's discomfiture and disappointment were too obvious one day to escape notice. Garth, who was really annoyed, and had been complaining in no very measured terms, caught sight of the girl's crimsoned face, and at once held his peace. But the next day he marched into the kitchen, and found Susan and her coadjutors at work.

It was really a picturesque sight. The girls had rolled up their sleeves in imitation of Susan, and the round dimpled arms were very white and pretty; the coarse bib-aprons could not disguise the slim figures. Cathy had tied a handkerchief over her dark hair; she looked like a young Zingara as she walked across the kitchen, flourishing her basting-ladle; she was stirring some savoury mess in a great iron pot. 'Far over hill and dale freely we roam,' sang Cathy. 'Queen, I am sure this will be a success, it smells so good.'

'Hush! here comes your brother,' ejaculated Queenie. The smooth rolling-pin slipped out of her hand; the sunshine streamed through the window on the red brick floor, and the white table heaped up with ripe fruit, with great golden plums and clusters of red cherries. One level beam had touched the girl's brown hair with gold; her coarse apron enveloped her. She looked like Cinderella before her pumpkin chariot arrived.

'So I have two new cooks, have I?' laughed Garth, as he lounged against the doorway. What a pretty picture it was — the low dark kitchen never looked so inviting before. He made Cathy bring him some cider, and then helped himself to some of Queenie's fruit. Queenie picked him out the juiciest plums with her long white fingers; they had quite a little feast together, the girls waiting on him. Before he went away Queenie had finished rolling out her dough; the tarts were all in the oven before Susan's testy hints were taken, and she had her kitchen to herself.

In the afternoons they sat over their work with Langley in some shady corner of the garden. Sometimes, but not often, Miss Faith joined them.

'Cara does not want me, and so I have come up for an hour, she would say. Her quiet eyes would brighten, and a tinge of colour would come into her face, at the sight of the little party gathered on the lawn. Sometimes Garth would be there, stretched on the crisp short grass at Langley's feet, with his paper or his book beside him. He always started up, well pleased, at the sight of Miss Faith.

'Miss Charity cannot always have you; other people want

you too,' he would say, as he brought out another low basketwork chair, and gathered her a rose or two, for Miss Faith had a passion for flowers. Garth dealt in these chivalrous little attentions; it pleased him to tender these sort of offerings to the women he delighted to honour. 'You are my patron saint,' he would say to her, as he laid the flowers beside her. 'Faith is very necessary to us all, but you never seem to remember that,' with almost an affectionate intonation in his voice.

'I am only necessary to Cara,' she would answer sadly. She took Garth's little speeches, his flowers, his kind looks, as simply as they were offered. To the quiet woman of thirty-five, who had no life of her own to live, and who had laid her own shadowy hopes, her unspoken desires, on the shrine of stern duty, there was nothing suspicious or incongruous in Garth's devotion; he liked her, and she was fond of him. Any other thought would have been impossible to either of them.

Cathy once hinted at this.

'Garth cares for Miss Faith more than for any other woman; he always has,' she said once to Queenie. 'I used to wonder, long ago, whether anything else would ever come of it. Men do care for women who are older than themselves sometimes, and though she was never pretty she has such a dear face; but I see now that such a thought would never occur to either of them.'

'Of course not,' interrupted her friend indignantly. 'Miss Faith is very nice, but she is old for her age. You see, youth has been crushed out of her. She would make a nice Sister of Charity; the dress would just suit her. I like her pale creamy complexion; but she is far, far too old for your brother,' finished Queenie, to whom the idea was somehow repugnant. Miss Faith, with her soft plaintive voice and little close bonnet, beside the strong vigorous man, still in the glory of his youth! Queenie's ideas were very vague on the subject, but she thought the woman that Garth Clayton honoured with his preference ought to be very nice indeed.

'Are you nearly through D'Aubigne's Reformation, Miss Faith?' Cathy would ask her, a little wickedly, on these occasions. Miss Faith would answer her quite seriously; she

did not perfectly comprehend a joke. Poor woman, the little pleasantries of life, the fun and drollery of young wits, were almost unknown to her.

'We are still in the fourth volume,' she would sigh; 'it is hard reading for summer days, but it suits Cara. Hope quite enjoys it too, but it is a treat to sit out here and listen to the birds, and do nothing but work and talk. I think I almost dislike books, though I should not like Cara to hear me; but then I never was clever.'

'I think you would like the interesting sort,' returned Langley simply. 'Do you remember how much you cared for the volume of Jean Ingelow's poems that I lent you? you told me you cried over the "Song of Seven."'

'Oh yes, I love poetry,' brightening visibly; 'but I could not make Cara interested in it in the least; she calls it moonshine and milk and water.'

'That comes of having a strong-minded woman for a sister,' interrupted Cathy, who never liked to be long silent.

'My dear, Cara is very strong-minded; she is always talking about my having no mental backbone. She says if we do not exercise our mind, drill it thoroughly, and put it through a course of mental calisthenics, that we shall never keep it in a healthy condition. She thinks it a waste of time to read novels, unless they are Sir Walter Scott's or Miss Austin's. I know it is very bad taste, but I never could admire Miss Austin.'

'But you enjoyed Dombey and Son,' interposed Garth, who abhorred strong-minded women, and could not tolerate Miss Charity; hearing her opinions quoted even upset his equanimity. 'Never mind what Cara likes; we are each bound to have our own individual taste. If Langley likes pickles better than strawberry jam she has no right to prevent Cathy from feasting on the latter dainty. I hate rules and regulations for grown-up people; it is just as though we want to bring back the swaddling clothes of infancy.'

'I am afraid I am not fond of rules, and I do like poetry and novels,' returned Miss Faith timidly. Here amongst these young people she felt a different creature; their ideas were as fresh and sweet to her as Garth's roses that she had fastened in her belt. 'I must go now; but you have done me so much good, you always do,' she said presently as she rose. Garth pleaded hard that she would stay, but she only shook her head at him wistfully.

'No, don't tempt me; Cara would be disappointed when she woke up from her afternoon nap if she found I had not returned; it is not nice to disappoint people, and then her

pain might come on again.'

'At least you might promise to drive over with us to Crossgill to-morrow; we are going to introduce Miss Marriott to the Cunninghams. Langley cannot go, and there will be a spare place in the waggonette.' But Miss Faith would not promise. Two afternoons of pleasure would be unheard-of dissipation; she would never hear the last of it; and what would Cara do without her reading?

'As though we cared about that,' muttered Garth, sotto evec, and then, as he returned from unlatching the little side gate, he paused a moment by Queenie. 'There goes one of life's unsolved enigmas—a good woman thrown away on a selfish one. I know you agree with me, Miss Marriott; I can

read it in your face.'

Queenie gave him a bright, understanding smile. just finished a most artistic-looking patch in an old frock of Emmie's, and held it up in critical approval. 'When people are so good they can hardly fail to be happy,' she said with alightly qualified assent. Somehow she did not pity Miss Faith quite so much this afternoon; it was a little contrary of her perhaps, but then, had she not gone away with Garth's roses in her belt? and had he not called her his patron saint. and hinted that she was necessary to him, to them all? Queenie felt that even Miss Faith's life was not quite devoid of all sweetness when such speeches as these were made to Garth had not sufficient vanity to guess at these thoughts, but he seemed quite disposed to linger by Queenie's side and argue out the matter. He had been quite absorbed by Miss Faith's conversation while she remained; and now it would be refreshing to turn to Queenie. It did not occur to him to pick roses for her, but he stood beside her, and watched her deft fingers move swiftly over her work, with a lazy sort of pleasure.

'No one could doubt her goodness,' he went on, taking up

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the thread of his argument; 'the question is, is she quite right to give up her own will so entirely to her sister? One may be good and self-sacrificing, and yet preserve one's individuality.'

'I think she is not quite sufficiently strong-minded.'

'Don't; if you knew how I hate that word! it is Miss Charity's war-cry. Women do not need to be strong-minded, they ought to be pliant, yielding, ready to take impressions; a woman with an inflexible will is a man in disguise. If Miss Charity had married—poor thing, she might have done so once, and have rued taking the step to her dying day—she would have ruled her husband with a rod of iron, much as she rules Miss Faith.'

'I suppose she is fond of her,' doubtfully.

'Oh yes; tyranny does not exclude affection, at least among women,' was the grim answer. 'Miss Charity is only forming her sister's education, moulding her taste, in fact; she little knows how all the maxims slide off her like the rain off a duck's back. Away from her sister she is a different creature—dares to hold her own opinions, and to own to her own modest tastes. I call Miss Faith exquisitely feminine; don't you think that is the word for her, Miss Marriott?'

'Yes,' replied Queenie, hesitating. It was very pleasant to have Garth there beside her, talking on any subject; but she almost wished that he would praise Miss Faith a little less. How did she know, Cathy might be wrong after all; Miss Faith was only seven years his senior, and there were so few people in Hepshaw. Queenie was still too young to know how silent a man generally is on the merits of a woman he actually loves.

'I mean her to go over to Crossgill with us to-morrow,' he said presently, returning to the charge. 'If I have to beard the lion in his den, and Miss Charity on her couch, I intend to have my way. I know what I will do, Langley shall go over there after tea, she has great influence with the dominant cardinal virtue. Willing or unwilling, Miss Faith goes with us to-morrow.' And Garth, as usual, had his way.

It would be hard to tell whether Queenie or Miss Faith enjoyed the drive and the lovely scenery most. Cathy was on the box beside her brother, and had the reins more than once in her hands, and only Emmie remained with them.

Miss Faith was a quiet companion, and at first Queenie missed her friend's lively tongue; but by and by they fell into a pleasant channel of talk, which proved so interesting that they were both surprised when Garth told them that they were within sight of Crossgill, and that in another five minutes

they would be at the Vicarage.

They were descending a steep winding road as he spoke, and in another moment they entered the village. Queenie always spoke of it afterwards as one of the prettiest villages she had ever seen. A little stream flowed down the middle of the road, the cottages looked picturesque and in good condition; a fine old church seemed to tower in symbolic majesty over the whole place. Emmie and she uttered a simultaneous cry of admiration when they first caught sight of Crossgill Vicarage. It was the ideal Vicarage; the neatlykept gravelled paths, the exquisitely trimmed lawn, the flower-beds masses of variegated colours, the rare shrubs and plants, all spoke of the owner's cultivated taste; the house itself, with its quaint casements and low bay-windows, was almost embosomed in creepers and climbing roses; the porch was full of flowers. As the door opened they found themselves in a little square hall, wainscoted in oak, with an oak staircase and low gallery running across it.

An old servant with a wrinkled face, evidently about eighty years old, welcomed Cathy and Garth with beaming smiles. Garth shook hands with her.

'Well, Nurse, I have brought visitors to see your young lady. Oh, there is Miss Dora,' as a slight girlish figure crossed the gallery, and came rapidly down the broad low staircase towards them.

What a picturesque little figure it was. Picturesque—that was just the word for her. No one in their senses could have called Dora Cunningham pretty, but taken altogether she was simply charming.

She was dressed so quaintly too; the shady coarse straw hat, with the wreath of wild convolvuli, just suited the pale piquante face; and over her dark blue cambric she wore a long narrow holland apron, laced across the bodice in oldcentury fashion, and bordered with antique silken flowers. A kitten's soft head and innocent blue eyes peeped out of one of the pockets. 'You have come at last,' she said with just a slight accent of reproach, and a little satirical elevation of the eyebrows. 'I have been looking for you for weeks past. Where is Langley? and why has not Ted been to see me lately?'

'I have brought Miss Faith and our guest, Miss Marriott, instead,' returned Garth. 'This is her little sister Emmie. Are you going to give us some tea, Miss Dora? Where is your father? Shall I go and look for him while you show these ladies your pretty drawing-room and conservatory?'

'Nurse, will you send papa to us, please. No, Mr. Clayton, I am not going to let you escape like that; you owe me some apology first for your long absence. What have you been doing? What have you all been doing? Come in here; I mean to catechise you.'

Miss Cunningham spoke in a brisk, pleasant voice, though it had a sharp, decided note or two in it. She marshalled her guests with perfect ease and self-possession into the long bay-windowed drawing-room. A white-haired, aristocratic-looking man in an old gardening coat came out of the conservatory with a watering-pot in his hand.

'Papa, you must come and talk to Miss Marriott and Miss Palmer, please. Let me take that watering-pot away; it is trickling all over the carpet, and your coat is covered with lime. Do you like a low chair, Miss Marriott? If you sit there you can see the flowers in the conservatory, and just a pretty peep of the garden. I hope you will talk to papa; he is so fond of talking to strangers. Miss Palmer, you know papa, of course?'

'Miss Faith and I are old friends, my dear,' interposed Mr. Cunningham.

'Yes, I know; it is Miss Marriott who is the only stranger,' returned Dora calmly, untying her hat. She had white dimpled hands, rather like a baby's. 'Now, Mr. Clayton, please tell me what you have been doing with yourself all this time?'

Mr. Cunningham proved himself a most genial host. He took Miss Faith and Queenie into the conservatory, and gathered some of his choicest flowers for them. A little

summer shower had just commenced; the light patter of drops on the glass roof blended unceasingly with the voices. Dora's canaries were singing loudly, a small blue-black Skye terrier scampered over the wet lawn. Miss Faith seemed rapt in quiet happiness; Queenie was just a trifle absent and distracted.

Through the conservatory door she could catch sight of a pretty group. Dora sat in her little low chair, and Cathy had ensconced herself on the rug at her feet. Garth stood with his broad shoulders propped against the wooden mantelpiece, looking at them both. His face wore an amused expression; evidently he was well entertained.

'Do you think her pretty?' whispered Emmie, coming round to her sister's side. 'She is like a picture, somehow; but I like your face best, Queenie; there is more in it.' Queenie could not understand why the child's remark jarred

on her. She coloured hastily and turned away.

But she told herself afterwards that Emmie was right on one point. Dora Cunningham was certainly not pretty; her teeth were a little too prominent, her nose was somewhat blunt and unformed, and her eyes were blue and still, and had no special depth in them. Her fair hair was her chief beauty; it was very abundant, and she wore it gracefully, just simply turned off from her face and knotted carelessly behind.

At this early stage of their acquaintance Queenie hardly knew whether she was attracted or repulsed by the young mistress of Crossgill Vicarage. Her perfect self-possession, her absence of all consciousness, her cool, businesslike comments on things in general, her faith in her own management and powers of observation, astonished Queenie not a little.

From the first she had taken possession of Garth, quite

frankly and openly.

'I always leave the ladies to papa,' she said to Queenie, as she led the way by and by into the hall, where tea had been prepared for them. 'Papa is such a lady's man. I always get on best with gentlemen, at least if they are like Mr. Clayton. Girls are all very well in their way, but men are so much more amusing. I daresay you think the same?'

'I have never thought about it; I have seen so few gentle-

men in my life,' answered Queenie, a little confused by the question. The music and drawing-masters at Granite Lodge and Caleb Runciman were about the only specimens of manhood with whom she had been acquainted, until her arrival She was afraid, too, that Garth had at Church-Stile House. overheard Miss Cunningham's frank speech; if he had, he took no notice. He placed himself at the little oval table beside his young hostess, and looked at the plump childish hands, busy amongst the old china cups and saucers.

The old nurse stood behind her mistress's chair, and joined in the conversation. She and Garth seemed great friends.

'Well, Nurse, how are Miss Beatrix and Miss Florence?'

'Well, very well, bless their dear hearts. Miss Beatrix is taller than Miss Dora even, and is growing prettier than We want them back, Mr. Clayton, sir.'

'Now, Nurse, that's nonsense,' interposed Dora briskly. 'Remember they are gone for their good, not ours. Beatrix must finish her education before she comes home; you know papa and I have settled that.'

'I don't think the poor young ladies like foreign parts so well as home, sighed the old woman plaintively. 'Miss Flo writes beautiful letters, to be sure; but she says she is homesick sometimes.'

'Have you sisters?' inquired Queenie, with a little sur-She thought Dora was the only inhabitant of the prise. Vicarage.

Dora nodded. 'Yes; there are the girls. Nurse is talking about them now; she is always talking about them. They are at school in Brussels. They are very well, of course, for girls, only I have never forgiven them for not being boys. have always so longed for a brother—a great big brother to take me about when papa is lazy or tired,' appealing to Garth with candid blue eyes, not unlike the kitten's.

'What a pity we can't make you a present of Ted,' returned Garth coolly; but Nurse interposed again with the

garrulity of age.

'Miss Dora, dear, I can't bear to hear you talk so; it doesn't seem right, does it, sir ? with those sweet young ladies for sisters, adoring her and spoiling her as they do. Why, one of these days, my darling, you will have a husband to take you about; that will be better than a brother, won't it, Mr.

Clayton, sir?'

'I suppose I shall have a husband some day, but there is no need for you to drag him in beforehand, Nurse,' returned Dora with perfect composure, as she tied on her broadbrimmed hat again. The allusion in Garth's presence did not disturb her equanimity in the least; she took it quite as a matter of course. 'It is only Nurse's nonsense,' she said, turning calmly to Queenie; 'if she talked so to the girls it would be different, but nothing matters to me,' with a little curl of her lip and a shrug.

'I think you must miss your sisters, living here alone ?'

observed Queenie, by way of changing the subject.

'Oh, as to that—papa and I miss them, of course. They are well enough for girls, only they are just at the gauche age, you know; when they are older I shall know better what to do with them.'

'Then are you never dull?' asked Garth. 'I should have thought Flo especially would have left a void in the house; she was so bright and full of fun.'

'I should have called Flo noisy,' exclaimed Dora quietly. 'Busy people are never dull; I should have thought you would have found that out by this time.'

'I know you emulate the busy bee, and improve each

shining hour, Miss Dora; but still---'

'I suppose you mean to be satirical?' with a little scorn.
'You men think there is no work done but by yourselves.'

'Oh no; I am sure your list of duties must be very long,'

evidently teasing her, to her father's great delight.

'Quite long enough for a woman,' she returned pointedly. 'I have my housekeeping, and my schools, and the mothers' meeting, and the penny club, and the coal and blanket fund, and the library, besides odds and ends of business, and all my visiting. Papa and I work together, and in the evening I read to him.'

'Dora is my right hand,' interposed Mr. Cunningham, look-

ing at his girl fondly,

'After all men must have some one to help them,' returned Dora loftily. She delivered herself of her little speech

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Parthian-wise, as she rose from the tea-table, turning her shoulder somewhat upon Garth as she did so.

'Are we such helpless creatures then?' he asked in a low voice, following her.

'Most of you are,' she replied calmly. 'Miss Marriott, the rain is over, shall we take a turn in the garden?'

## CHAPTER XIX

### TANGLED

'Women do not like a man the worse for having many favourites, if he desert them all for her. She fancies that she herself has the power of fixing the wanderer; that other women conquer like the Parthians, but that she herself, like the Romans, can not only make conquests, but retain them.'

THE conversation had now become more general; but towards the close of the visit Queenie found herself alone with Miss Cunningham. They were standing in the porch together. Garth had gone round to the stables to see after the waggonette, and the others were in the Vicar's study, turning over a portfolio of old engravings. Queenie had been more than half disposed to follow them, but Miss Cunningham had detained her.

'You will find this pleasanter than papa's dark little study; besides, he does not want us now he has Miss Faith Palmer. Why do men like talking to her so much?' she continued in a perplexed voice. 'She is not a bit clever, or what one would call attractive, and yet Mr. Clayton and papa are always lauding her to the skies.'

'She is very good,' returned Queenie. After what had passed between herself and Garth she was disposed to hold her peace on the subject of Miss Faith's merits. Some hours had passed since her arrival at Crossgill Vicarage, but, strange to say, she was less than ever inclined to be communicative to Miss Cunningham.

'So are you and I good, at least I hope so,' answered Dora promptly, 'though we do not dress in grey, and wear a

close bonnet like a Quaker. I am a foe to that sort of goodness that must cloak itself in a peculiar garb. By the bye, how do you get on with Langley Clayton? she is one of the good sort too.'

'I think she is one of the best women I ever met,' was the enthusiastic reply; 'she is almost perfection, so unselfish

and so unobtrusive in everything she does.'

'Yes; Langley is Langley; but she is a trifle too melancholy for my taste. I don't like people to go through life in a sort of "patience on a monument" attitude. One suspects all manner of strange backgrounds, and then it is so provoking. Langley is Langley, of course, but I like Cathy best.'

'Have you known them long, Miss Cunningham?'

'Ever since I was so high,' putting her hand about three feet from the ground. 'I used to call Mr. Clayton Garth once, till he got so big and grand that he used to frighten me; not that I am at all frightened of him or any other man now,' she continued, with a curl of her lip, 'one sees their weaknesses too plainly for that. How long are you going to stay at Church-Stile House, Miss Marriott?'

'About three weeks, I believe, that is, until the cottage is ready for us. You know, I suppose, that we remain in Hepshaw. I am the new schoolmistress. Mr. Clayton and Mr. Logan have elected me,' explained Queenie simply; but, nevertheless, making the statement with some reluctance. She had a notion that Miss Cunningham would think it

strange.

Dora absolutely started, and then bit her lip.

'You! Why you must be joking!'

'No, indeed, Miss Cunningham.'

'Why did they not tell me? It is Cathy's doing, I suppose, to keep you near her, you are great friends I hear; but I am surprised Mr. Clayton allowed it for a moment. You,—excuse me, Miss Marriott, but I cannot get over my surprise,—you look so unlike a schoolmistress. Did you ever see your predecessor, Miss Drake?'

Queenie shook her head. She felt a little discomposed; the cool scrutiny of the blue eyes did not please her. Dora's searching glance took in every detail—the well-gloved hands,

the dainty French tie, the little brown hat with its pheasant's wing, all the finish and detail that marks the gentlewoman's taste.

'No, you are not much like Miss Drake,' she replied coldly; and a little cloud of dissatisfaction and perplexity knitted her brow.

They both seemed relieved when Garth made his appearance with the waggonette. Dora at once went in search of the rest of the party. Miss Faith and Emmie joined them instantly, but Cathy still lingered.

'Come, Catherine, come, it is getting late,' exclaimed her brother impatiently; 'you and Miss Dora have gossiped enough by this time.' Cathy gave him a laughing look as she jumped into the waggonette, and ensconced herself cosily

by Queenie.

'Don't be cross, Garth. No one calls me Catherine but Mr. Logan and Miss Cosie. I have only been mystifying Dora on the subject of our young friend here. She seems "struck all of a heap"—to use an elegant but most expressive phrase—at the notion of her turning schoolmistress. What business of hers is it, I should like to know? Let her mind her own parish.'

'Hush, Cathy, be quiet; she will hear you,' interposed Garth sharply, as he turned round to wave an adieu to the little figure in the porch. Dora stood with her hand shading her eyes, watching them until they were out of sight. She looked still more like a picture framed in roses, her straw hat hanging on her arm, and the sunset shining on her

fair hair.

Garth turned round more than once, and then he resumed the subject somewhat irritably.

'What has Dora got in her head, I should like to know! she looks as if something does not please her. What non-sense have you been talking, Cathy!'

'Plaze your honour, no nonsense at all, at all,' began Cathy mischievously, but a glance at her brother's side face, which looked unusually grave, sobered her in time. 'Garth, don't be such a griffin, or I will never take you out to tea again. Dora chose to cross-examine me as to Miss Marriott's motives in taking the singular step of becoming our school-

mistress, and I thought her curiosity somewhat impertinent, and so took a delight in baffling it.'

'I expect it was you who were impertinent, Cathy,' returned Garth, still displeased. 'Surely such an old friend as Dora has a right to interest herself in our affairs if she likes.'

'Not at all,' returned his sister haughtily; 'besides, this is not our affair at all, it is Queenie's. What right has any one to poke and pry into her motives? Of course you always take Dora's part, you and Langley are alike in that;

but she got nothing out of me.'

'My dear Cathy, Miss Cunningham is perfectly welcome to know everything, as far as I am concerned,' interrupted Queenie, somewhat distressed at this argument. These slight diversities of opinion were not unusual between Cathy and her brother; but Queenie had never before heard him express himself so strongly.

'I am glad you take such a sensible view of it,' returned Garth, mollified in an instant. 'Cathy is thoughtless with her tongue sometimes, and hurts people. Miss Cunningham always takes a lively interest in all that concerns Hepshaw; you see, their own parish is managed so admirably—Crossgill is quite a model village in every way—that she feels she has some authority in speaking.'

'All meddlers have authority, self-imposed, of course,' observed Cathy, sotto voce. Nevertheless, the remark reached

Garth's ears.

'What makes you so hard on Dora this evening?' he asked good-humouredly. 'She deserves a good scolding, does she not, Miss Faith? You are generally such good friends; something has gone wrong to-night, eh, little one?'

He spoke coaxingly, but Cathy would not be induced to answer. 'She was sick of Dora; she would have Dora on the brain if they did not change the subject,' was her pettish reply, and, seeing her in this mood, Garth, like a wise man, dropped the subject. But the conversation made a painful impression on Queenie; in her heart she sided with Cathy. She thought Miss Cunningham's curiosity unjustifiable in the last degree. 'What is it to her how long I remain in Church-Stile House and in Hepshaw?' she said proudly to herself.

This feeling was not mollified when, two days afterwards,

Cathy informed her that Miss Cunningham had driven over in her little basket-carriage, and was at that moment talking to Langley in the drawing-room.

Queenie changed colour a little as she put down her book.

'So soon!' she ejaculated.

'Yes; she has come to return our call, and to see Langley,' with a meaning look, that made Queenie feel still more uncomfortable. 'No; we need not go to her just yet; Langley will bring her out to us by and by. I think I shall tell Susan to let us have some tea, it is so delightfully cool and shady under these trees.'

'Wait a moment, Cathy,' catching hold of her dress, as she brushed past her, on hospitable thoughts intent. 'Tell me

why you do not like Miss Cunningham.'

'But I do like her,' returned Cathy, opening her eyes widely. 'Who has said anything to the contrary? I think she is a dear little thing, and as good as gold. Why, her father and sisters dote on her; only they have spoiled her between them.'

'Then what put you out so the other night?' persisted Queenie.

'My dear, that is a complaint to which I am often subject. Many things put me out, you do sometimes, and so does Garth, dear, stupid, blundering old fellow that he is.'

'Yes; but, Cathy, do be serious; you were as cross as possible that evening with Miss Cunningham, and would not

say anything in her favour.'

'Well, I believe I was cross,' candidly. 'If there be one thing I hate it is to be managed, and Dora will try to manage people. It is all very well in Crossgill, where every one worships the ground she treads on,—and of course she is very clever, and does no end of good,—but it is different when she tries to manage us here. It will be time enough for that when—that is, if—but I think I will leave that part of my sentence unfinished,' continued Cathy provokingly, and she ran away into the house, leaving Queenie still more mystified and uncomfortable.

Tea had long been set out on the low table under the planetree before Langley made her appearance with their visitor. The blue cambric and the broad-brimmed hat, wreathed with wild convolvuli, seemed quite familiar to Queenie. Dora held out her hand to her with perfect good humour; perhaps her manner was a trifle condescending.

'Well, I have come over to talk to you, and hear all about it,' she said, taking possession of Garth's favourite basket-work chair, and unfastening her hat in her old fashion. 'Papa says that I am too fond of interfering in every one's business, and that the world would go on just as well without me; but I can never believe that,' with a low laugh, as though the idea amused her. 'Fancy Crossgill and papa without me!' folding her dimpled hands complacently.

'I daresay they would do very well,' interrupted Cathy, who was hovering near her with some rosebuds in her hands. Dora calmly helped herself to some, and went on talking.

'They will have to do without me some day, of course. It is a woman's duty to marry, and I suppose I must submit to my destiny. The girls will be sad managers; but no one could expect me to remain an old maid on their account. I have brought them up, and when I have introduced them into society I shall consider that I have done my duty.'

'Hear, hear,' interposed Garth from the background, so suddenly that even Langley started. Queenie thought that now, at least, Miss Cunningham must look conscious and confused; but she did nothing of the kind; she only faced round coolly on the interloper, and asked what he meant by eavesdropping in that fashion?

Garth laughed and made himself comfortable on his old grey plaid at her feet; but he looked a little mischievous.

'So there are limits to your sisterly self-sacrifice after all?'
Dora gave a slight shrug.

'Self-sacrifice, without limits and without common sense, remind one of the Suttee and the car of Juggernaut. When one is speaking generally it is a pity to particularise. At present I have too much on my hands to trouble about my future. There are the girls, and Flo is always in scrapes, and wanting me,' finished Dora, in a quiet, matter-of-fact way.

'But Flo is nearly sixteen!'

'Yes, and Beatrix is seventeen. I mean Beatrix to remain at Brussels another year, in spite of papa and nurse; she is young for her age, and is far too shy and unformed to bring out at present; Flo has much more in her. But I did not come over here to talk about the girls and myself,' continued Dora frankly; 'they are good girls of course, but they are much more trouble than if they had been boys. I wanted a chat with Miss Marriott, and to hear all about this school business. I have had to do with schools all my life, you know,' turning to Queenie; 'and we have a charming place for our mistress at Crossgill. I have all sorts of ideas in my head, and shall be able to help you,' ran on Dora, in a brisk, businesslike way that almost took away Queenie's breath.

'You are very kind,' she began hesitatingly, and then she stopped. What business was it of Miss Cunningham's? why need she brook patronage from a girl so little older than herself, and a perfect stranger? But Dora misconstrued her

momentary hesitation.

'Oh, you need not mind troubling me, I take interest in all sorts of people and things. Papa calls it interference, but I know better. Most people content themselves with their own little sphere of duty, and don't trouble themselves beyond it, but every one is welcome to my advice or assistance.'

An inexplicable smile crossed Garth's face, but he made no remark. A close observer might have said that he was watching the two faces before him, with a view to comparison. Dora made a pretty picture as she leant back in her low basket-chair, with her sunny hair, and the roses fastened in her blue cambric. Queenie looked a little sombre and shadowy beside her in her brown dress. Her eyes were downcast; she looked disturbed and ill at ease; she had lost something of the brightness and independence that were her chief charms.

'I don't like talking about myself and my own affairs,' she said, with natural reserve; but somehow it sounded ungracious in her own ears. Miss Cunningham was an old friend of the family; perhaps she was wrong in treating her like a stranger; but Dora was not repulsed by her coldness.

'I daresay you feel a little proud about it; I should in your position,' with a patronising kindness that made Queenie's cheeks burn. 'Miss Drake was such a very different person, quite commonplace and ordinary. I think she was a small tradesman's daughter. It must be difficult

to fit yourself to such a position, to come down to it with

dignity.' But Queenie would hear no more.

'You talk as though I were somebody, and not a poor governess, Miss Cunningham. I hope it is not beneath a clergyman's daughter to teach the children of honest people. It is not the work, it is the motive that ennobles the worker,' cried the girl, turning on her young adviser with burning cheeks, and her eyes suddenly shining. 'If I teach the children of the poor, I remember that I am poor myself. I shall not be ashamed of my position, or forget that my mother was a lady. I cannot forget what is due to myself or her, or to Emmie's mother, who brought me up, and made me what I am.'

Dora raised her pretty eyebrows in some surprise; this

little burst of sentiment perplexed her.

'I did not know you were such an impulsive character, Miss Marriott. You remind me of Flo a little, it is just her way of breaking out when she is lectured; not that I am presuming to lecture you,' with an amused look; 'I am only offering you advice and assistance. Miss Drake and I used to have long talks, did we not, Langley? and settle all sorts of things. She was a very ordinary person, and a little commonplace, I must confess, but she was always ready to take advice.'

'I fear you will not find me quite so submissive as Miss Drake. I am only humble to those whom I know and love, and who love me!' replied Queenie, with a soft unsteady smile. 'You are very good, Miss Cunningham; but I do not see how you can help me in this. I have Langley and Cathy, and they trust me a little,' finished the girl, with a touching inflection in her voice; 'and for the rest, it is hard uphill work, and I must fight my way alone;' and then, as though to put a stop to the argument, she rose and placed herself by Langley's side.

'I don't understand. I hope she does not think me interfering. Perhaps she does not know that Hepshaw is a sort of second home to me!' returned Dora, in unfeigned perplexity, turning to Garth. Rebuffs were unknown to her; she was far too used to worship to take them kindly; her face changed and clouded a little. 'I call it such a pity to

show this sort of feeling in such a position. You have all of you made a mistake, Mr. Clayton; she is far above her work.'

'There you are wrong,' replied Garth warmly. Dora had risen, and he had followed her, and they were standing by the little gate looking down the plane-tree walk. Some children were planting flowers on a newly-made grave; some one was practising on the organ; through the open door they could hear snatches of Bach's Passion music. 'Believe me, you are wrong; Miss Marriott's a fine creature. She thinks nothing beneath her, and would work herself to death for that little sister of hers. You are both good creatures; I wonder why you persist in misunderstanding each other?' he continued in an aggrieved voice, and with a man's usual blindness in such cases. 'I am disappointed that you do not care more for Langley's protégée, Miss Dora.'

'Oh, as to that, I like her well enough,' she returned, a little coolly; 'she is in good style and lady-like, only far too impulsive for my taste. She reminds me of Flo, and you

know I always find Flo rather troublesome.'

'I know your conduct to your sisters is perfectly admirable,' was the answer. 'You have been a mother to them in every sense of the word. Why Flo perfectly adores

vou. Dora.'

'I am used to being adored,' she returned quietly. It had not escaped her notice that he had gone back to his old habit, and called her Dora; she rather liked it than otherwise. It was very pleasant lingering by the little gate in the sunset. She was quite aware how pretty a picture she made, with her uncovered hair, and the roses in the blue cambric. Garth, tall and dark, and in his grey working suit, made a splendid foil to her.

'Shall we take a turn on the terrace?' he asked in a low voice, unlatching the little gate as he spoke; but Dora shook her head. It would be very pleasant wandering there in the sunset with Garth Clayton; but then there were the girls, and Flo not sixteen yet. Things were progressing certainly, but perhaps, under the circumstances, it would not be wise to expedite matters. Her sisters must be introduced into society, and Beatrix must be trained to take her position at Crossgill Vicarage before she could turn her attention to

such things. There must be no loitering in the sunset just now; men were impressionable, and well, perhaps Garth's manner was a little different to-day; he certainly looked a little disconsolate over her refusal.

'I shall gather you some roses before you go; you won't refuse them I hope, Dora,' he returned, somewhat discontentedly.

'Yes, you may gather me some; but you must not call me Dora, please. It is a great pity, but we are not children

now, and people will talk.'

'Let them talk,' returned Garth, now really provoked. He was very proud, and this repulse did not suit him. The sunset was inviting, and the shining little head beside him seemed to draw him with golden meshes. He was half serious and half jesting, but the mood and the hour had a certain sweetness not to be lightly lost; but if she chose to repulse him, well, it had not gone very far, and on the whole he preferred his freedom; but here Dora was looking at him pathetically with her blue eyes.

'Are you cross with me? one cannot always please one's self. Papa will want me; and one has so many duties,' sighed the young diplomatist, 'and cannot choose one's pleasures,' looking at him shyly, but with a certain softness.

'No; you are very good. I suppose I am like other men, and want my own way. Do you think if you had more

to do with me that you could cure me, Dora?'

'Hush, here comes Miss Marriott,' she returned, laying her hand warningly on his arm. It was a very pretty hand, and showed well on the grey coat-sleeve. He had called her Dora again, but she did not again rebuke him; somehow his tenacity did not displease her. 'He will be troublesome by and by, but I think I shall be able to manage him,' she thought, as she turned with a somewhat heightened colour to the new comer.

Queenie came between them as they fell apart; she was not thinking of them just now, but of something that she had schooled herself to say.

'I told Langley that I must come after you, and she said that I was right. I wanted to say, Miss Cunningham, that I was wrong just now. I ought to have thanked you more for your interest and what you said to me; you meant it kindly, very kindly, I am sure.' Queenie spoke in rather a measured voice, as though she were repeating a lesson; but Dora received the apology very graciously.

'I thought you would think better of it, only you were so impulsive, and missed my meaning. People always take my advice in the end, they find it answers. They know that I

take interest and want to help them.'

'Yes; and I ought not to reject any well-meant kindness,' returned Queenie, with still more effort, as she noticed Garth's keen survey of them both.

'I am glad that you have decided that we are to be friends and not enemies,' replied Dora calmly, but half-amused by what she termed an exaggeration of feeling. 'I know I shall get on with you better than with Miss Drake. She was such a very ordinary person, and dressed so very oddly.'

'There is no comparison between Miss Marriott and Miss Drake,' interposed Garth, a little sharply. 'Let every one

stand on their own merits.'

'You are perfectly right,' was the composed answer. 'I am only glad that we all understand each other so well. I shall come and see you in your cottage, Miss Marriott, and then I am sure we shall become friends.'

Queenie did not answer, but a rebellious flush rose to her cheek. She had come between them, and was still standing there on the little path. The children had planted their flowers and had gone home. The music had ceased, and the organist had closed the church. 'Let us go back to the house and to Langley,' observed Miss Cunningham a little impatiently, when the silence had lasted a moment. But as the girls walked back to the house side by side Garth did not accompany them. He was gathering roses.

# CHAPTER XX THE KING OF KARLDALE

'I ask thee for a thoughtful love,
Through constant watching wise,
To meet the glad with joyful amiles,
And wipe the weeping eyes;
And a heart at leisure from itself,
To soothe and sympathise.'—L. WARING.

A FEW days after Miss Cunningham's visit Langley came into the room where the girls were sitting as usual, chatting merrily over their work.

'Cathy, do you think you could spare Queenie to us for a few hours?'

tew nours

'That depends upon circumstances, my dear,' was the cool response.

'Because Garth and I want her. I have just had a letter from Gertrude, and she and Harry wish us to go over there to-morrow; she is very unwell, I fear, and Garth thinks it would be such a good opportunity to show Queenie the beauties of Karlsmere.'

'Why should we not all go? Do go and coax him, Langley.'

'Indeed I cannot,' replied Langley earnestly. 'Gertrude is such an invalid that we cannot fatigue her with numbers. No, it is no use teasing him,' as Cathy made an impetuous movement to the door; 'he has quite decided that he will only take Queenie and me. I thought it was very nice of him proposing it,' with a deprecating glance at her sister's disappointed face; 'it will be a treat for Queenie; and you

know in another week or so she will have to begin work in earnest.'

'You and Garth never care for me to go over to Karldale,' began Cathy a little crossly, but Langley stopped her rather hurriedly. She was a trifle moved from her ordinary composure; her face looked more worn and anxious than usual; a nervous flush glowed in her thin cheeks.

'My dear, you never will believe in Gertrude's ill-health.

I am sadly troubled about her, and so is Garth.'

'I have small sympathy for people who are always calling "wolf,"' replied Cathy, taking up her work again. 'I believe Gertrude's temper is most in fault.'

'Then we will not argue about it,' returned her sister, with a little sigh. She was very patient, but Cathy's mood evidently jarred on her. Cathy threw down her work again with such impatience that her needle broke as her sister left the room.

'Why will she give in to that woman's whims as she does! I can't understand it. Gertrude makes a perfect slave of her when she goes there, and actually Langley seems to like it. She is always going over there now; and she comes back tired out and fit for nothing.'

Do you know, I think it vexes Langley dreadfully when you depreciate Mrs. Chester; I have noticed it more than

once,' observed Queenie, in her shrewd way.

'I know it does, and my wretched temper makes me do it all the more; but Langley is such a patient old dear that I hate to see her domineered over and victimised by a woman like Gertrude. When I see her with that worried look in her face I am always ten times more bitter; and then I am so fond of Harry, and Karlsmere would be so delicious this weather, and I own I was cross,' continued Cathy, with the frankness that made her so lovable; 'but of course you must go to please them, and Emmie and I will spend the day with Miss Cosie.'

Queenie was thankful that the matter was so amicably settled; but since her friend was not to join in her pleasure she would not dwell on her own anticipations, delightful as they were; but in her heart she thought how good it was of Mr. Clayton to include her in their little trip. Since that

day in the granite quarry his manner had insensibly changed to her; always kind and gentle, it was now tinged with stronger interest. A pleasant cordiality marked their intercourse; he was always thoughtful for her comfort and pleasure. Unconsciously, Queenie was beginning to depend for much of her present happiness upon this friendship with Garth Clayton. 'It is almost as good as having a brother of my own,' she said once to Cathy. Queenie's hard-working life, with its stern, morbid realities, had left her scant leisure for the ordinary dreams of girlhood. She had never mapped out any bright future for herself; possible lovers had not stolen across the sad margin of her thoughts. 'Those things were not for her,' she had said to herself. 'Other women had a strong arm to lean upon, other women had fathers and brothers or husbands to work for them, and shield them in the battle of life; she had to work for herself and her helpless little sister, that was all. And so she took up her burthen bravely, neither repining that such things were, nor wasting her best energies with fruitless regrets for impossibilities. No vague sentimentalities preved on her healthy young nature; no bitterness for her joyless youth marred her sweet serenity. 'Everything will be made up to us there, I am sure of it,' she would say to herself, with tender, oldfashioned wisdom. 'One day I shall get old, and not care so much about these things; perhaps Emmie will marry, and I shall be aunt Queenie, and take care of her and her children.'

And so, with the courage of perfect innocence, and with a simplicity that was perfectly free from self-consciousness, Queenie gave herself up to the delight of this new friendship. There was no one to warn her of danger; no one to bid the brave young heart shield itself with greater reserve and prudence, to question her of the meaning of this strange happiness that seemed to flood her whole being with brightness.

Every one is so good to me, and I am so happy,' she said almost daily. When alone her thoughts were a perpetual thanksgiving. An insensible change had passed over her thoughts with respect to Garth, she was less critical; the defects and flaws of character she had at first noticed in him became less apparent; his slight arbitrariness, his pride, his

masterful assumption of power, even his lack of deep intellect were all unnoticed. If he spoke, Queenie was as ready to obey his behests as ever Langley or Cathy were. If his want of ambition, his perfect content with himself and his surroundings, sometimes surprised her, she began to credit him with greatness of mind; or if she were too shrewd for that, to own to herself that even his very faults were more lovable than other people's virtues.

'He is a sort of Bayard; he is as courteous to me as though I were the greatest lady in the land, instead of a village schoolmistress,' said the girl once with tears in her eyes. 'And see how good he is to those ladies at The Evergreens: he let Miss Hope talk to him for a whole hour about her Temperance Society, though I could see he was dreadfully bored by her. He never hurts people's feelings by letting them see that they trouble him.'

'My dear, Garth is perfection, and I am glad you have

found it out,' was Cathy's reply.

Queenie found vent for her feelings in a grateful little speech when she next saw Garth. He came in at the drawing-room door, throwing his head back in his usual fashion, and shook himself like a rough terrier.

'What a state I am in, I look like a miller; the roads have quite powdered me. I hope we shall have rain before to-morrow.'

'Oh, Mr. Clayton, I have been wanting to thank you ever since I heard it. It will be so delightful—to-morrow I mean.'

'That remains to be proved; we shall enjoy it all the more for having you with us,' was the pleasant answer. 'I have been waiting for an opportunity to drive you over to Karlsmere ever since you came. The lake is charming, and you will get quantities of parsley fern for your cottage garden. By the bye, I have been in there this morning, and the workmen are getting on famously; all the holes are stopped, and there's another coat of paint on. I hardly knew the place. We shall be losing you in another fortnight, I am afraid;' for Queenie had obstinately refused to burthen her friends with their presence a day longer than was necessary.

She tried to look pleased at this announcement; but a pang crossed her in spite of herself at the thought of leaving

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Church-Stile House. The cottage seemed dull by comparison. True, she should often see them, and Cathy would be in and out perpetually; but she would no longer be his guest, sharing in the pleasant everyday life of the family, making one in their plans, a party to their little jokes and pleasantries. 'It is time for me to go, I am getting spoiled amongst you all. I feel I have been idle long enough,' she said to her friend afterwards; but somehow she sighed as she said it.

The day at Karlsmere proved as delightful in reality as it was in anticipation. Garth was in one of his boyish, frolicsome moods. He and Queenie hunted for ferns, and gathered wild flowers, while Langley walked thoughtfully beside the margin of the beautiful lake. It was a golden day in Queenie's memory. How often she recalled that walk afterwards. blue shimmering lake, so still and silent in the sunlight; the winding roads; the steep woody height on the farther bank; the pretty Vicarage with its trim garden and the tiny church, reminding her of a small ill-furnished room. The tall athletic figure in the grey suit, vaulting lightly over the crisp bracken high above them; the handful of wild flowers tossed laughingly at her; Langley standing on a smooth white boulder, looking with grave unsmiling eves at the baby waves lapping to her feet. How well she recalled it all.

'There's Harry coming to meet us,' shouted Garth; but Langley did not hear him. She stood in that strange, self-absorbed attitude, motionless and oblivious, till Nan ran up to her and pulled her dress; and then the colour rushed over her pale face with surprise, and she stooped and pressed the child closely to her.

'Little Nan, my dear little Nan,' she whispered.

'I am father's Nan,' lisped the child. 'I am nobody's Nan but father's. Father's up there,' pointing with her forefinger to the rocks above them. 'He and Jeb are both there. I carried Jeb, but he was heavy, and my arms did ache.'

'Yes, you are father's Nan,' repeated Langley dreamily; 'father's little comforter;' and as she kissed the little face a sudden mist rose before her eyes.

'Why are your eyes wet when you kiss me?' questioned Nan curiously, 'and why do you always kiss me so close, so close? Mammie never does; but only father, only father and you.'

'Hush, Nan; I love you. Do you hear me, Nan! I love you dearly, dearly.' Langley spoke in a strange, stifled

voice, but the child only gazed at her in surprise.

'You need not cry about it. You know father loves me too, but he never cries over me. Mammie does; but then she pushes me away.'

'Ah, poor mother is ill, you know.'

Nan reflected a moment gravely. 'Yes; her head did She said, "Go away, Nan, you tire me; go to father and Jeb;" and I did go. Mammie does not love Nan much."

'Oh, hush, my darling, hush! poor mother!'

'She did often say, "Go away, Nan; Nan is naughty."

But Nan is good, always good; father says so.'

'What are you talking to Langley about, you little chatterbox? Here is Jeb whining his heart out for you,' called out 'Stay where you Mr. Chester from the bank above them. are, pet, and father will come and carry you.'

'Father's coming,' echoed Nan placidly. She stood quite quiet and patiently while he talked to Langley; but when he lifted her in his arms she seemed to nestle into them with a little coo of content. Once or twice during their walk her father stooped over her and peered into the white sun-bonnet rather anxiously.

'She is not quite as strong as she was, and seems to tire sooner,' he said to Langley. 'Gertrude tells me I am wrong to let the child go about so much in the heat. But what am When I leave her at home she makes herself ill I to do? with fretting. Naughty Nan,' in a tone of infinite tenderness.

'Nan always good,' was the somewhat drowsy answer.

'God bless her, so she is, my little white angel. Look at her, Langley; this is just what she does: she always falls asleep in my arms like this. Sometimes she is so heavy that I am obliged to put her down. I wonder how I should feel if I were a poor man on the tramp, with my child in my arms, and the world before me. I wonder, too, what mammie would do without us,' as Nan opened her dark eyes, roused by the suppressed vehemence of her father's voice.

'Mammie did say, "Go away, Nan; Nan makes mammie's

head to ache."' .

'I am afraid mammie says that far too often,' was the

somewhat bitter reply. 'It seems hard for a mother never to be able to bear her child's presence.'

'Hush! Miss Marriott will hear you, Harry!' interposed Langley gently. Mr. Chester looked round and shook his head.

'No; they are too far behind, and seem engrossed with each other's conversation. Look here, Langley, we are old friends, and you know all our troubles, and I tell you truly, things are getting worse every day.'

Langley's pale face turned paler, but she made no answer.

'Sometimes I think if I could only see Gertrude happy and contented I should not mind what became of me; I wear out my heart to please her. I do not think she has ever heard a harsh word from me since I married her; can any husband do more?'

'No, indeed; you are good, very good, to her,' was the almost inaudible reply.

'And yet it has come to this, that I have no wife and no home, for without sympathy how can one be said to possess either. If she would only greet me with a smile sometimes; if she had a kind word for me or this child; but you heard what she said just now. She is a sensitive little creature, and

I fully believe her mother's indifference pains her.'

'Harry, indeed, indeed, you must not be hard upon Gertrude; if you only knew how she suffers.'

'Do I not know it? She will not be long with us, my poor Gertie, I am sure of that; she is wasting every day, Langley; Dr. Marshall says so. That is what makes it so bitter to think there can be no peace now. If I could only make her happy; if I could be sure that she has not repented of marrying me; but sometimes I think that if I had left her amongst her own people she would not be pining herself to death as she is now.'

A look of intense pain crossed Langley's face.

'You must not think that.'

'But how am I to help it, when I see her drooping and wasting before my eyes, my own wife, whom I have sworn to cherish? Sometimes I dread that she will tell me so; and then, how am I to bear it?'

'Gertrude will never tell you so;' but Mr. Chester shook

his head. 'She will never tell you so,' repeated Langley in a steadier voice. 'In spite of her unhappy nature Gertrude is a good woman. Harry, you always listen to me as if—as if I were your sister; do try and believe what I say this once.'

'What am I to believe?'

'That it is not your fault. Gertrude says you are goodness itself to her and the child; sometimes she speaks of you both so tenderly. Why will you not go on bearing things as you have done, so patiently, so nobly, and trust that Providence will bring good out of all this evil?'

'Then you think that there is nothing that I can do for her. I half hoped that you would find out something that

she wanted, some wish that she might express.'

'Then I will let you know,' replied Langley, with assumed In reality her heart was as heavy as lead, the cheerfulness. talk had oppressed her. Ever ready with her sympathy she had yet found it hard to comfort him. What comfort could there be in such a home—a hasty, ill-assorted marriage, defective sympathy, inequalities of temper, physical sufferings impatiently borne, the daily burthen of sickness without ameliorating circumstances, and all this patiently, nay, heroically endured. What was she to say but that he was blameless? Whose fault was it that all this had come upon him? that he was walking by her side, groaning aloud for once in the very heaviness of his spirit? What could her words be to him but meaningless truisms, that must fall flatly on his Had she any comfort at all to offer him? was not such comfort placed beyond his reach and hers for ever?

Unconsciously she slackened her pace as such thoughts came to her, and in a few minutes the others joined them, and

the conversation became general.

Queenie was delighted with the look of the Grange, as Mr. Chester's house was called. It was a rambling grey stone house, standing just at the head of the lake; a picturesque old archway embosomed with ivy admitted them into a place half garden, half orchard, with a low fence dividing it from the crofts; the large square hall was used as a summer sitting-room. From the inner room a tall dark-eyed woman advanced languidly to meet them, wrapped up, in spite of the summer day, in a costly Indian shawl.

'Well, Gertie, I have brought your friends,' exclaimed her husband cheerfully; 'I met them half-way down the lake. I hope you have not been expecting us before.'

'You must have dawdled on your way then,' returned Mrs. Chester fretfully, 'for I have been waiting for at least an hour, until I thought I should have been too nervous to receive them; but that is the way when you get with Langley,

Harry, you never remember poor me.'

'I am sure we walked here straight enough,' replied Mr. Chester hastily; but Langley, with a sweet look, stopped him.

'We have ventured to bring our friend, Miss Marriott, Gertrude: Garth wanted to show her Karlsmere. what an invalid you are, and will not make any demands on your strength. Now you must go and establish yourself comfortably on your couch, while Queenie and I get rid of some of our dust, and Harry puts dear little Nan in her crib.'

'I tell Harry that he is killing that child, by dragging her about in the sun,' rejoined Mrs. Chester, with a shrug of her 'He will not listen to me. One would think he had a dozen children, and could afford to lose one or two; but there, it is no use my talking to him.'

'Why, Gertie, I thought you said that your head was bad. and that Nan was worrying you,' observed her husband in a

deprecating voice.

'Well, but she might be playing upstairs with her Noah's Of course I am only a mother, and don't understand

children; but look how flushed her face is, Langley.'

'She is only rosy with sleep,' interrupted Garth, stooping 'What a pretty little face it is! She is more like you than Harry,' continued the artful young diplomatist; 'she has got your eyes and eyelashes, Mrs. Chester.'

'Yes; she is very like you, Gertie,' replied her husband eagerly. 'Garth is right; I never saw it so plainly before.'

'Other people have always seen it,' was the somewhat pointed answer.

'O, Langley, I don't like her at all,' exclaimed Queenie, when she found herself alone with Langley in the large pleasant room overlooking the crofts. 'I always thought Cathy was prejudiced; but I think her so-so disagreeable.'

'She has been waiting for us, you see, and that always

makes her nervous; one must make allowance for an invalid's fancies.'

'Some invalids are quite pleasant,' returned Queenie stoutly.
'There is a fretful chord in her voice that jars somehow. She is very slim and elegant, and I suppose some people would call her handsome; but I don't like her gloomy dark eyes, and her mouth goes down at the corners. I always distrust people's tempers when I see that.'

'I did not know that you were such an observer, my dear.'

'I know when people's faces please me, and when I shall get to love them,' was the oracular rejoinder. 'I could never love Mrs. Chester, Langley, though I might get to pity her in time,' and Langley attempted no further defence.

Queenie found her first impressions only deepened as the day went on. There was a carping fretfulness in Mrs. Chester's manner to her husband that must have provoked a less sweet temper, but at times he scarcely seemed to notice it. When the child was in the room she seemed to engross all his attention; when she was absent he appeared restless and ill at ease. 'She can be pleasant to every one but to him,' Queenie thought to herself. 'Cathy was right when she said that she detested that woman.'

But even Queenie and Cathy might have found some pity in their youthful intolerance if they had overheard the brief fragments of a conversation that passed between Mrs. Chester and Langley.

'O, Gertrude, I know it is hard; but if you would only try, for his and the child's sake, to control yourself a little; you do not know how unhappy you are making him.'

'Does he complain of me to you?' she demanded fiercely;

'that would be manly and generous on his part.'

'Do you want me to leave off talking to you?' replied Langley in a tone of genuine grief. 'O, Gertrude, Gertrude, what will you say next? Do you wish to know what he did really say? He asked me if there was nothing he could do for you. He begged me to find out if there was any wish that he could gratify; he—but I cannot repeat it. If you had only heard what he said!'

Mrs. Chester rose feverishly from her couch and caught hold of Langley's dress.

'There it is. No, don't turn from me, don't look so shocked; you know it is his very goodness that makes me worse. Why is he so good to me when I try him so? Sometimes I think that I am possessed with some sort of evil spirit: I can't help tormenting him. O, Langley, why did he insist on my marrying him? why did he not leave me in my old home when he knew, when I told him, that I could not ever care for him as I could for that other? when-' but Langley stopped her with a face of horror.

'Hush! don't mention his name! Harry's wife can have no remembrance of that sort. You are a good woman.

Gertrude: I have always said so.'

'No, no,' she returned, bursting into tears; 'don't judge me out of your merciful heart, Langley. I have never been a good wife to Harry, and I never shall. I try to forget, but the effort is killing me. Oh, why did he not leave me in my old home, and not have doomed us both to this misery?'

'Hush! you are not yourself to-day! I cannot hear you talk any more in this way;' and Langley rose, pale and resolute. 'Put yourself and your unhappiness aside, it is too late to talk of such things now; think only of the duty you

owe to Harry and your little child.'

'Yes, my little child, who will so soon be without a mother,' she returned, weeping passionately; but Langley only stooped over her with sad dry eyes, and, kissing her, bade God bless

her, and turned away.

# CHAPTER XXI

### A GOLDEN HARVEST

'Yes; keep me calm, though loud and rude
The sounds my ears that greet;
Calm in the closet's solitude,
Calm in the bustling street;
Calm in the hour of buoyant health,
Calm in my hour of pain;
Calm in my poverty or wealth,
Calm in my loss or gain.'—BONAR.

IT had been arranged that Queenie should return to Carlisle for a day or two before entering on her new duties, leaving Emmie behind her at Church-Stile House. She must bid good-bye to her old friend, Caleb Runciman, and redeem her promise of seeing Mr. Calcott again. A brisk correspondence had been kept up between her and Caleb. The old man had expressed himself well satisfied with her plans, though many and sore were his regrets at losing her and his little favourite. 'I told Mr. Calcott your intention, as you wished me, my dear,' wrote Caleb, in his cramped neat hand. 'He received the news in silence, but after a while he muttered, "Well, well, it will do for a time; but it seems strange. Frank Marriott's daughter a village schoolmistress!" and then he asked, querulously, if the girl were coming back? I think he misses you, my dear, though not more than I do; and what we shall do without you and the precious lamb is more than Molly and I can tell; but she has got your old room ready, and has baked a firstrate cake; and there's a warm welcome waiting for you, Miss Queenie, my dear; so no more at present, from your attached friend, Caleb Runciman.'

The day after their return from Karlsmere, as they were sitting at breakfast, Garth looked up rather suddenly from the paper he was reading. 'Miss Marriott, I am afraid you have lost a friend,' he said, rather abruptly. 'Andrew Calcott of Carlisle is dead!'

'Uncle Andrew! O, poor Uncle Andrew!' exclaimed Emmie mournfully; but Queenie only started and turned pale.

'By some mistake the announcement has been postponed; he died three days ago. Ah, there is the postman coming up the walk. I should not be surprised if you have another letter from your old friend, Mr. Runciman.'

Garth was right; but Queenie rose from the table and carried off the letter to read in the privacy of her own room. Cathy found her quietly crying over it when she went up some time afterwards.

'I did not think I should have minded it so much,' she said, drying her eyes as Cathy entered; 'but it seems so dreadful, his dying alone in the night, with no one near him. Perhaps Caleb was right, and he may have passed away in his sleep.'

'Is that all they know about it?'

'Yes; they just went up in the morning, and found him lying there quite cold, with a smile on his face. He never would let any one stay in his room; that was one of his peculiarities. Caleb knew this would happen one night, but he seems dreadfully down about it. I am to go over next Thursday, you know, and he says this need not make any difference.'

'You will be sorry that you have not seen him again.'

'Yes; it is that that troubles me. I cannot bear to think that I have been enjoying myself all this time, and that he has been missing me. I remember now, that he seemed to think that it was good-bye.'

Queenie's bright spirits were quenched for the remainder of the day. Her tender heart was grieved by the thought of the lonely deathbed. Garth found her looking still pale and depressed when he came back from the works. To distract her thoughts he took her and Cathy for a long country walk, from which they did not return until late in the evening. He had never been more gentle to her, Queenie remembered afterwards. He and Cathy had restrained their high spirits, and had only talked to her of what roused and interested her—of the school, the cottage, and plans for her new life. Walking back in the moonlight, their conversation flowed in graver channels. He and Cathy talked of their mother; and Queenie for the first time had a clue to the passionate devotion with which Garth regarded her memory.

She bade good-bye to her friends rather sadly when the day arrived for her to go back to Carlisle. She was only to be absent three days, and yet the separation caused her an effort. Why had the place grown so suddenly dear to her that it cost her a pang only to turn her back upon it?

Garth and Cathy accompanied her to the station.

'I do not know what I shall do without you, Queen,' exclaimed her friend disconsolately.

'We shall all miss you, Miss Marriott,' echoed Garth brightly. 'Take care of yourself, and come back to us as soon as you can.' And the pleasant words lingered long in her memory.

But, in spite of herself, her journey was a dull one. Mr. Calcott's sudden death still oppressed her. The day was sultry and sunless; heavy thunderclouds brooded on the edge of the horizon; the air was surcharged with electricity; a storm seemed impending. It broke upon her long before she arrived at her destination. Queenie sat quietly in her place and watched the fierce play of the elements, half fascinated and half bewildered; a vague excitement seemed roused in her, a strange disturbance and sense of change oppressed her.

'I am just the same, and yet I feel different,' she said to herself; 'I suppose this storm excites me. I wonder if he meant it when he said he would miss me, or if it was only his way; he must always say something pleasant. I wonder if he would be very sorry if I were never to come back. Would it make any difference to him, really? They are all going to the Abbey this evening; how I wish I could be with them; but this is unkind to my poor Caleb. I am ashamed to think how selfish I am getting. I will try not to think of Hepshaw or Church-Stile House until Monday;' but, in spite of her good resolutions, her thoughts had travelled there again before another half-hour had elapsed.

The storm had ceased, but the rain was still pouring steadily down as Queenie plodded through the streets of Carlisle. She had to pass Granite Lodge on her way to Caleb's; but the sight of the grim portico made her shiver and avert her eyes. She gave quite a sigh of relief when she found herself in the dark entry of Caleb's house, with Molly's bright face smiling at her.

'Ay, the master's in there. Master, master, here's our young lady come an hour before her time!' vociferated the good woman, dropping curtseys profusely in her excitement.

'Why, Molly, my dear creature, you need not to be so ceremonious,' exclaimed Queenie, pressing the hard hand between both her own; 'it is only Miss Queenie; surely you have not forgotten me in this little time.'

'No; but I must not forget my manners to my betters,' returned Molly, colouring and dropping another hurried curtsey. 'But go in there, my dear young lady. I think he is a bit dazed with his sleep, or something, or he would have come out to meet you.'

Caleb rose from his chair rather feebly as she entered; his

blue eyes had certainly a dazed look in them.

'Miss Queenie, my dear,' he said, rather tremulously, 'I am not so young as I was, and things sadly upset me. Molly is a good creature, but her intelligence is limited. I have wanted you badly the last few days, you and the precious lamb.'

'Dear Caleb, if I had known that I would certainly have

brought Emmie.'

'No, no need; it is only an old man's whim; she is better off where she is. I have been trying to write to you the last day or two, Miss Queenie, my dear; but I got so flurried and made such poor beginnings that I was obliged to give it up, not being so young as I was, my dear, and soon upset by what's over and gone.'

'I am afraid it has been a sad shock to you,' observed Queenie gravely. Caleb's wrinkled hand was quite cold and shaking, and Queenie rubbed it in a soft, caressing way as she

spoke.

'You might have knocked me over with a feather,' returned Caleb, reverting to his favourite expression. 'It was

not so much the shock of his death, though I have worked for him, boy and man, just fifty-five years last Michaelmas, nor the manner of it, for he slept away as peaceful as an infant; it is what came after, the mysterious dealings of Providence; but I must have my pipe, saving your presence, Miss Queenie, dear, and you must have something to eat and drink to keep up your strength; and then you and me will have a deal of comfortable talk together, when we are both more composed; and Queenie, seeing how agitated the old man really was, yielded with her usual sweet unselfishness, and went up to the little room, with the big brown bed, where she and Emmie had slept, with the window overlooking the stonemason's yard, with the great slabs and blocks of stone.

The rain was dripping on the sheds and the white, unfinished monuments. Queenie stood for a long time listening to the soft patter on the leaves, until she fancied she was in the Warstdale granite-quarry, sitting amongst the grey stones, with Garth stretched on his plaid beside her, and roused herself with difficulty.

She went down after that, and poured out tea for herself from the little black teapot, and did justice to Molly's cake; and looked at the grate, wreathed with sprays of silvery honesty, and wondered if the rain had cleared up at Hepshaw, and whether they would go after all to the Abbey; and then scolded herself for being so stupid and abstracted.

Caleb was rather quiet also, and sat regarding her solemnly through his puffs of smoke; now and then he seemed about to speak, but checked himself. He cleared his throat rather nervously when Queenie had ended her little repast and took a seat beside him.

'Now, dear old friend, I am refreshed, and we can have our talk,' she said cheerfully. 'Fill your pipe again; you never talk so well without it, you know. I want to tell you about Emmie, and the cottage, and the school, and the dear people at Church-Stile House; if I do not begin now I shall never get through it all in three days.'

'Ay, ay; but there is something we must talk about before that; the cottage and the school were all very well once, but now things are different. As I said before, I am not so young as I was, Miss Queenie, dear; and you will not

flurry me and make me nervous if I tell you a few of my

thoughts?'

'Now, Caleb, you are not going to speak against my little scheme,' cried the girl reproachfully. 'It is all settled; nothing in the world could shake my purpose. I would rather be the schoolmistress at Hepshaw, and earn my daily bread, than be the richest lady in Carlisle.'

The old man adjusted his pipe with trembling fingers.

'Do you hear me, Caleb?

'I hear you, Miss Queenie, my dear.'

'Do you believe what I say? When I lie down at night I am so happy that I cannot sleep; I can hardly say my prayers sometimes, I want to sing them instead. Think of Emmie and I having our wish, and living in our own cottage! Will you come and see us there, dear, you and Molly?'

'No, Miss Queenie; I hope not. Listen to me, my dearie. There, my pipe is out, but never mind; somehow I can't smoke it to-night. Supposing you were rich, very rich,

Miss Queenie, how about the cottage then?'

'Suppose that you were talking nonsense,' she returned, laughing. 'Do you know, I have learnt to make bread, and to cook, and to mend, and to iron, and to do all sorts of useful things. I mean my cottage to be the cleanest and the prettiest in Hepshaw. There is quite a large garden, only it was grown over with rank grass; but Captain Fawcett and Mr. Clayton have had it dug up. We mean to plant beans and peas, and all kinds of vegetables; but I shall have roses and mignonette under the windows.'

'My dear, you must listen to me; never mind about the cottage just now. What did I say to you, dearie, about the mysterious dealings of Providence? Things happen sometimes that we never expected. What were you saying, my dearie,

about being the richest woman in Carlisle?'

The old man's manner was so singular that the girl gazed at him in astonishment.

'Supposing something strange had happened, Miss Queenie,' he continued nervously, 'and you were to wake up one morning—this morning, say—and find yourself a rich lady, what should you say to that, my dearie?'

'I—I should be sorry, I think. O, Caleb! what do you

mean?' she implored, roused at last by his agitation.

'No, no; don't say that, Miss Queenie, dear; it is tempting the good Providence that has turned his hard heart, and made him restore to you and that precious lamb fourfold of what was due to you. "I was sick and ye visited me." There it is, my dearie; and the blessing has come back to you again when you least expected it.'

'Caleb, I cannot bear this,' exclaimed the girl, turning suddenly very pale. 'Do you see how you are trying me? Is there something I ought to know, and that you are trying to prepare me to hear—something about Mr. Calcott and

Emmie?

'Nay, nay; not about Emmie.'

'About myself, then?'

'Ay,' patting her hand tremulously, 'about yourself, Miss Queenie, dear. You have woke up this morning a rich woman. Mr. Calcott has left you all his money.'

'Oh, Caleb! no,'—Queenie's voice rose almost to a cry-'not to me, surely, surely! You must mean Emmie!

Emmie is his niece, not I; I am nothing to him.'

'Ah! but you ministered to him like a daughter; you

were not turned from him by his hard words.'

'But I was cruel, and left him alone in his sufferings; I never came back even to wish him good-bye. I have been thinking of myself, not him, all this time. Caleb, I can never take his money, it belongs to Emmie; I can never defraud Emmie,' and Queenie leaned her head on her old friend's shoulder and burst into a perfect passion of tears.

Caleb stroked her hair gently. 'Hush, my pretty; there is something like five thousand a year, all in safe investments. But the lawyer will be round here presently, and tell you all about that. He has left me an annuity of two hundred a year in return for fifty-five years of faithful services. Think of that, Miss Queenie! You might have knocked me down with a feather when I heard that.'

'Yes; but Emmie,' she sobbed. 'I cannot defraud Emmie.'

'Bless you, Miss Queenie, dear, you are not defrauding the poor innocent. If the money had not come to you it would have gone to some hospital. Have you forgotten his vow, that his sister and her child should never inherit a farthing of his money? No doubt he repents these rash words of his, and he means you to take care of Emmie, and give her the benefit of his wealth.'

'Are you sure, quite sure, that he meant that?'

'Positive and certain, my pretty.'

'And you do not think I shall be wrong to accept his bounty for her sake?'

'Surely not. It would be quarrelling with the dispensa-

tions of Providence.'

'I feel so oppressed,' cried the girl, laying her hand on her bosom; 'there is a weight here as though I were sorry and not glad. If he had given me a little I could have taken it and have been thankful, but so much crushes me somehow.'

'How about the cottage now?' interposed Caleb jocosely, trying to rally her, but she stopped him with quivering lips.

'Hush! I can bear no more, not to-night. Did you say the lawyer was coming? Let me go away for a little, I feel sick and giddy, and I want to understand it all.'

'Then run away, my dearie, and I will send for you when he comes; there's a bit of a letter or a paper that he

wants to give you.'

'She is as cold and white as a bit of marble; I wonder what's come to the pretty creature,' he muttered when he was left alone. 'She is not heart glad, I can see that. She has a scared look in her face, as though she had lost her foothold somehow.'

Queenie had regained her calmness by the time the lawyer made his appearance. She listened to his explanations and instructions silently but with composure, only her compressed lips and closely-locked hands showed the intense strain of feeling under the quietude of her manner.

'Five thousand a year; you are sure that is the sum

mentioned?' she said, when he paused once.

'Yes; house property, and investments in the funds, consols, and various securities will yield about that sum, I should think. The furniture is to be sold, but the plate and valuables are yours. There are various legacies to old servants, and a pension or two; but to-morrow we can go over particularly into details.'

'And it is all for my own use and benefit?'

'Exactly so; the terms of the will are binding. There is to be no partition or deed of gift to any other person during your lifetime. There is a small sealed paper addressed to you, which Mr. Calcott gave into my hand, and which you had better read at once, it may throw some light on his conduct.'

Queenie took the paper. It was written in a feeble, almost illegible, hand, and was not easy to decipher; the beginning

was strangely abrupt.

'I have told you that I have no niece; I must wash my hands of the child. When a man has taken an oath upon his lips it is too late then to talk of repentance. But I can trust her to Frank Marriott's daughter. Mind, girl; I say that I can trust you, and a dead man's trust is sacred.

'My money is my own to do with it as I will. I have no relation in the world, for the child is nothing to me. Do you remember telling me that you were sorry for me, that no one would shed tears over my grave? I can recall your words now. "It must be so dreadful not to want love, to be able to do without it." Child, child, what possessed you to say such words to me?

'Well, you are wrong; Caleb will be sorry for me, the poor fellow has a faithful heart; and, if I mistake not, you will shed a tear or two when you hear that I have gone. Do you recollect how you reproached me the first time I saw you? "Though you were dying of hunger," you said, "you would not crave my bounty." You told me that I had given you hard, sneering words; that I was refusing to help you in your bitter strait; that I was leaving you, young and single-handed, to fight in this cruel world. Girl, those were hard words to haunt a dying man's pillow. Well, well, I am dying, and I know you have forgiven me, though I have a wish to hear you say it once; but I know you forgave me when you gave me that kiss. Ah, I have not forgotten that. I am leaving you all my money, think of that! to Frank Marriott's daughter! It has been a curse to me, mind you turn it into a blessing. Remember, I trust the child to you. Perhaps in the many mansions,—but there, Emily was a saint, and I am a poor miserable sinner. The child is like her mother, so take care of her. If Emily and I meet

—but there's no knowing—I should like to tell her the child has suffered no wrong,—the many mansions—there may be room for Andrew Calcott; who knows? There, God bless you; God bless you both. I am getting drowsy and must

sleep; 'but here the letter broke off abruptly.

'I found him exhausted with the effort of writing,' observed Mr. Duncan, turning his head away that he might not see Queenie's agitated face; 'he made me seal it up in his presence, and then begged us all to leave him. In the morning the nurse found him lying as you have heard, with his face to the light; he had been dead some hours. I was quite struck with the change in him when I went up; he looked years younger. There was a smile on his face, and all the lines seemed smoothed away. He had been a great sufferer all his life, and that made him something of a misanthrope.'

'Yes, yes; no one understood him, and even I was hard upon him,' returned Queenie, bursting into tears again. Ah, why had she forgotten him? Did she know that the dead hand would have been stretched out to her with a blessing in it for her and the child?

# CHAPTER XXII

### QUEENIE'S WHIM

'She knew not what was lacking,
Knew not until it came;
She gave it the name of friendship,
But that was not its name.
And the truth could not be hidden
From her own clear-seeing eyes,
When the name her own heart whispered,
And whispered too, "Be wise." —ISA CRAIG-KNOX.

THE storm had wholly ceased, but a few snatches of summer lightning still played on the ragged edge of the clouds when Queenie at last bade her old friend good-night, and went up to her little room, to think over the bewildering events of the day. The air was still oppressed and sultry. The white slabs of stone in the mason's yard shone dimly in the darkness; the wet ivy scattered a shower of drops on the girl's uncovered head as she leaned out, as though gasping for air. A faint perfume of saturated roses and drowned lavender pervaded everything. A blue-grey moth trailed his draggled wings feebly across the sill. The dark-scented air seemed full of mystery and silence.

Queenie leant her head upon her hands and tried to think, but in reality she was too numb and bewildered. 'What has happened to me? why am I more sorry than glad about it all? how have I deserved it? and what am I to do with all this wealth that has come to me?' she kept saying to herself over and over again.

A few hundreds would have sent her back rejoicing and

triumphant. A modest competency, an assured income, would have lightened the whole burthen of her responsibility, and made her young heart happy; but all this wealth! It would not be too much to say that for the time she was simply crushed by it.

'Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me.' Queenie, as well as Garth Clayton, had ever loved that prayer of the wise Agur. If she could have chosen her lot in life it would have been in some such words as these. To have sufficient, but not too much, was the very sum and substance of her wishes.

Now a strange sense of trouble and loss oppressed her. Her plans for the future were strangely disturbed; a moral earthquake had shattered her airy castles, and she was looking mournfully at their wrecks. Her cottage and her work, must she relinquish both? Was Emmie's childish notion of happiness to be frustrated also? 'I would rather be the school-mistress at Hepshaw than the richest lady in Carlisle.' How passionately she had said those words, and yet she had meant them from her very heart.

And then, with a sudden sharp pang, she remembered that it was one of Garth Clayton's peculiarities to dislike riches for women. A certain conversation that had passed between him and his brother occurred to her with painful vividness.

One of Garth's school friends had just married a wealthy widow.

'What a lucky fellow young Musgrave is,' Ted had grumbled. 'He was never a fellow for work, and now he need not do another stroke of business for the remainder of his life. See if I don't pick up a rich wife for myself one of these days.'

'What! you would consent to live on your wife's money!' returned his brother, with a face of disgust. 'You would help yourself out of her pocket, in order that you might eat the bread of idleness! a nice manly notion that.'

'Why should a man be bound to work for both if he does not choose?' replied Ted sulkily. 'I thought this was an enlightened age, and that the rights of women would entitle them to the honour of helping to be bread-winner. Don't pull such a long face, Garth; I would not marry any girl if

she were weighted in gold unless I liked her, only I mean to

invest my affections prudently.'

'I don't think I could ever fall in love with a rich woman,' was Garth's emphatic answer. 'I believe I am peculiar on this point. If I ever marry, my wife must be dependent on me, not I on her. Why one of the chief pleasures of matrimony must be to bully your wife sometimes, just to see how nicely she takes it; but if she has all the pounds, shillings, and pence on her side, she might turn round and bully me.'

'Garth, how can you be so absurd?' broke in Cathy.

'You see, a husband ought to have all the power,' he continued, in his droll, half-serious way. 'The threat of with-holding a new dress would reduce any woman to a state of abject submission. I should like my wife, provided I ever have one, which is not likely if you are going to be so extravagant, Cathy, I should like her to coax and wheedle me out of all her ribbons and fineries; but if she could demand a cheque for a new silk dress whenever she liked—"I should thank you to remember, Mr. Clayton, who it is that brought you all that money"—why, what a fool I should feel.'

'Langley, do hear him; when he pays all our bills without

looking at a single item.'

'Ah, but you are not my wife, my dear, that makes all the difference. The immaculate creature whom I honour with my regard must be made aware that she is marrying a man with a hobby. Why,' finished Garth, with a sudden glow of strong feeling on his face, 'it must destroy the very nature and meaning of things not to feel that your wife is dependent upon you for everything.'

How well Queenie recalled this conversation. How truly it spoke of the nature of the man—his sturdy independence, his pride and love of authority, and also of the tenderness that

loved to shield and protect.

Garth always cared most for what was dependent on him; feminine self-reliance seldom pleased him. Queenie's independence was simply owing to circumstances; she was strong-minded and yet not self-asserting; her force of will seldom came to the surface. In everyday life, amongst those who loved her, she was singularly submissive and yielding,

and from the first she had placed implicit trust in Garth Clayton, in a way that had touched him to the heart.

A bitter reflection crossed her mind now—Garth was good to her; he had in a way taken her under his protection, and was showing her much brotherly kindness; would he not lose interest in her now she was rich? Queenie remembered how coldly he had talked of a certain school friend of Langley's, a young heiress, who had lately settled some miles from Hepshaw. Langley had once or twice proposed driving over to see her, but Garth had always negatived the notion.

'Caroline is such a good creature,' Langley would say;

'she is not pretty, but thoroughly nice, and so bright.'

'Then go over, by all means, and see her, my dear; but I must ask you to excuse me from accompanying you.' And when Cathy had pressed him, he had seemed put out, and had muttered, 'That he had something better to do than to run after girls all day, especially when they were heiresses.'

Queenie thought of all this with a certain dismay and sinking of heart. She was an heiress herself, and he disliked heiresses. Perhaps, when he knew that, his manner would change; it would become cooler and more distant. How could she ever bring herself to bear that?

The thought of the cottage became every moment dearer. He was furnishing it for her now. He and Langley had been up to the sale, but the whole business had been kept a secret from her.

'You know you are to leave all these details to me,' he had remarked casually on his return. Queenie was quite aware how often Cathy and Langley were closeted with him in his study. Cathy would come out from these interviews very round-eyed and mysterious, and with an air of importance that amused Queenie. She had a notion once or twice that the pile of new towels and dusters in Langley's basket were not for the use of the inhabitants of Church-Stile House; but she dared not inquire the truth.

Was this pleasant surprise they were planning to be in vain? And then again, was she not bound by her work? The Vicar and churchwardens had elected her as mistress of the Hepshaw girls' school, was she not bound to fulfil her duties until the vacancy could be filled?

Queenie's young head and heart were in a whirl; regret, pride, pleasure, and yet pain, each in turn predominated. 'What shall I do? what ought I to do?' she kept repeating; and then all at once a look of amusement, almost of glee, crossed her face. 'I have it! but will it do? will it be right? Oh! what will Caleb say? And then if he, if Mr. Clayton, found out would he not think it childish and whimsical to the last degree; but I can't help it, I must have breathing

time and a little happiness first.'

When Queenie had reached this conclusion she laid her head on the pillow, but it was not easy to still her throbbing pulses; for almost the first time in her healthy young life sleep entirely forsook her. The morning sun was flooding the little chamber, the birds were twittering and pluming themselves amongst the ivy, before a brief forgetfulness sealed her senses; a confused dream followed. She thought she was standing on a lonely sand-bank, when suddenly it changed to shifting gold beneath her feet; she felt herself sinking, and cried out to some one to save her; and woke to find Molly's homely face bending over her, with a great bunch of roses in her hand.

'I have been out to the market, and I bought these of a poor decent-looking body. The master's been down nigh upon an hour, but he would not let me disturb you before this,' cried Molly, dropping one of her old-fashioned curtseys.

Queenie laid her hot cheek against the cool crimson hearts of the roses. 'Oh, Molly! you dear, kind creature, how delicious; and how thankful I am that you woke me. Do you know, you have saved me from a horrible death. I was drowning in gold, sinking in \$\display\$; it was all hard and glittering, and seemed to suffocate me. How sweet the roses and the sunshine are after it. Oh!' with a little whimsical shudder, 'I wish I had not woke up such a very rich woman, Molly.'

Queenie was in a curious mood all breakfast-time; she would not talk sensibly, and she would persist in turning a deaf ear to all Caleb's scraps of advice and wisdom. When their frugal meal was finished she dragged Caleb's great elbow-chair to the open window, and placed herself on the low window-seat beside it. 'Now, Caleb, I want to talk to you,' she said coaxingly.

'But, Miss Queenie, dear, it is getting late, you have over-slept yourself, you know; and there is the office, and

Mr. Duncan; he will be expecting us.'

'What is the good of being an heiress if one cannot do as one likes, and keep lawyers and those sort of people waiting?" returned Queenie coolly. 'I am a different person to the girl I was yesterday; so different that I have to pinch myself now and then to be sure that I am really Queenie Marriott, and I feel like that man in the Arabian not some one else. Nights' Entertainment, only I forget his name.'

'But, my dear young lady,' pleaded Caleb helplessly.

'Now, Caleb, you are to be good, and listen to me. I am quite serious, quite in earnest; and if you give me any trouble I shall just take the next train back to Hepshaw, and leave you and Mr. Duncan to do as you like with all this dreadful money.'

Caleb held up his hands in amazement. 'Dreadful money!'

he gasped.

'It is very rude to repeat people's words,' replied the girl, with a little stamp of her foot. 'It is dreadful to me; it has been suffocating and strangling me all night. I can't be rich all at once like this, it takes my breath away. Do you hear me. Caleb? I don't mean to be rich for another twelvemonth.'

'Aye, what' I am not as young as I was, and maybe I am a little hard of hearing, my dearie; and Caleb looked at

her rather vacantly.

'Listen to me, dear,' she repeated, more gently, laying her hand on his sleeve to enforce attention. 'I have been awake all night; the thought of all this money coming to me unearned and undeserved oppressed and made me quite unhappy. I do not want it,' hesitating, and reddening slightly over her words; 'it has interfered with my plans, and turned everything in my life topsy-turvy. It is not that I am ungrateful. or that I may not want it some day, but I must be free, free to do my own work, free to live my own humble life, free as a gipsy or Bohemian, for one twelvemonth longer.'

'Miss Queenie, dear, I call this tempting Providence,' began the old man solemnly. 'These riches are yours, and you must use them. Why bless your dear heart, they are earned and deserved over and over again, and every one who knows you will say so.'

'These riches are mine, and I suppose I ought to say thank God for them, and I think I do in my heart, for Emmie's sake,' she replied solemnly; 'but, Caleb, I am determined for another year I will not use them. I will take a little, perhaps; you and Mr. Duncan shall give me enough for present use; but for a year I will be the schoolmistress at Hepshaw, and nothing else.'

'The schoolmistress at Hepshaw!—five thousand a year! Heaven bless us and save us! I am getting dazed, Miss

Queenie. The schoolmistress at Hepshaw!'

'Yes; I am bound to my work, and I do not mean to shrink from it. I mean to hide up my riches, to keep them a grand secret even from Emmie; to live in my little cottage among my kind friends, and work and be free and happy for a whole year. Only one year, Caleb,' caressing him, for tears of disappointment stood in his eyes; 'only one little year out of my whole life.'

'And what then, Miss Queenie?'

'Then I must be brave, and buckle on my golden harness. Don't be afraid, dear old friend, I do not mean to shrink from my responsibilities; I would not if they were really and truly to crush me,' with a smile, followed by a sigh. 'I only want to have time to get used to the thought. I must teach and fit myself to be a rich woman before I am one. Now you must promise to keep my secret, you and Molly, and Mr. Duncan. No one knows me; no one need concern themselves about my business. I was Miss Titheridge's under-teacher, and now I am the schoolmistress at Hepshaw.'

'But, Miss Queenie--'

'Caleb, you must promise me. Hush,' kneeling down before him, and bringing her bright face on a level with his; 'I will not hear another word. It is a whim, dear; just Queenie's whim, and that is all.'

'I saw it was a bit of girl's nonsense, but I couldn't gainsay her coaxing ways,' said Caleb to Mr. Duncan afterwards. 'She always had a will of her own, had Miss Queenie; but in the main she is right and sensible, and has an old head on young shoulders. It is just a sort of play-acting. She has

set her heart on this school and cottage of hers, and nothing will do for her but to go back to it.'

'Marie Antoinette at Trianon! I have a notion that there is more in this than meets the eye,' argued the lawyer shrewdly, with a shrug of his shoulders. 'Well, well, Mr. Runciman, it is none of our business; the girl is absolute mistress of her own fortune. Morton and I are only joint executors, and bound to see things are right and fair; she might spend it all on that charity school of hers, and we should have no right to interfere.'

'But, all the same, it is a bit of pure nonsense,' returned Caleb, distrustful for the first time of his favourite's good sense.

'Don't trouble your head about it, Runciman,' was the good-humoured reply; 'the best of women have their crazy fits sometimes. Mark my words, before six months are over she will have changed her tune. Either the truth will have leaked out, or she will be impatient to try her heiress-ship; there's no knowing what will happen. She has asked me for fifty pounds; in another month it will be a hundred. Bless you, when her fingers have got used to the touch of bank-notes they will slip through them pretty readily.'

Queenie had got her way, but she found it somewhat difficult to pacify her old friend. She had just been out to buy some simple inexpensive mourning for herself and Emmie, and was standing by the table fingering the stuffs as

he entered.

'Silk and crape, that is what you ought to have worn, Miss Queenie,' grumbled Caleb, with a dissatisfied face; but

the girl only shook her head.

'Crape is such dusty, inconvenient wear in the country, and Emmie is such a child,' she returned; 'these simple stuffs will be far more suitable. Fancy my wearing silk dresses in that little old barn of a schoolroom, or in our tiny cottage!'

'This is all of a piece with your fantastical scheme. Cambric! why Molly could wear that,' continued Caleb, with the same rueful visage. 'Dear, dear, what a tempting of Providence, hoarding and hiding in this miserly way, Miss Queenie. Why, as I said to Molly, our young lady can take

one of those big new houses they are building near us, and have her carriage and her riding-horse; and no doubt she will visit at the Deanery, and at Rose Castle, and be an out-and-out fine lady; but I never thought it would come to this,' dropping his hands on his knees in a low-spirited way.

Queenie laughed, but she could not help an involuntary shudder at Caleb's picture of her future greatness. A house at Carlisle, a carriage, even prospective visits at the Deanery would be poor compensation if she must resign her friends at Hepshaw. Would not her fortune be productive of greater happiness, of more enduring pleasures than those Caleb offered her? 'If I must be rich I will be rich in my own way,' thought the girl, a little rebelliously; and all through that day and the next a thousand schemes and fancies flitted before her, as unsubstantial and impracticable as such airy castles generally prove themselves.

A new and perfectly strange feeling of timidity came over her as the time drew near for her return to Hepshaw. Some complicated business arrangements had compelled her to lengthen her three days' visit into a week. Cathy had written to scold her for her delay; and Queenie had to

ransack her brain to discover plausible excuses.

'Garth has just come in from the works, and he bids me tell you that you must positively return on Saturday evening, as the school is to reopen on Monday,' wrote Cathy. 'They are getting on so nicely at the cottage that it will be quite ready for occupation in another ten days; and Langley has discovered a little jewel of a maid, who will just exactly suit you. Do you remember her—Patience Atkinson, the rosyfaced girl who lived next door to the wheelwright's?'

Cathy's letter, with its girlish overflow of spirits and affectionate nonsense, caused Queenie a few moments' uneasiness. 'I shall seem to be what I am not. I wonder if I am doing wrong to deceive them,' she thought, with a sudden throb of startled honesty. 'No; after all, it is my own business. I may spend, or hoard, or fling it all to the winds, and no one would have a right to complain of me.'

But, nevertheless, there was a guilty consciousness that made her for the first time shrink from meeting Garth

It was evening when she arrived at Church-Stile House. Ted had met her at the station; Cathy and Emmie had come flying down the lane to meet them, and had greeted her rapturously. As she came across the moat, with the girls hanging on either arm, she saw Garth at the hall-door watching them.

'Why, what a truant you have been,' he said, in his pleasant way. 'We thought our new schoolmistress had given us the slip. Cathy had got all sorts of notions in her head. One was that Mr. Calcott had left you a legacy. She narrated wonderful dreams to us one morning, of how you had a great fortune, and were going to marry a

marquis.'

'Cathy is an inveterate dreamer,' returned Queenie, avoiding Mr. Clayton's eyes as she spoke. How constrained her voice was; she was hot and cold in a moment. How strange that he should address her in this manner. Was it a

presentiment or something ?'

'You are pale and tired; your visit to Carlisle has not agreed with you,' he returned, following her into the drawingroom, where Langley was waiting for them. 'It has brought back unpleasant memories, eh?' with an abruptness. not unkindly, but which made Queenie still more nervous.

'Yes; and I believe I am tired,' she stammered. Runciman was very good to me, but he found it hard to let me go; that worried me rather; that and other things,' —the truth reluctantly drawn from her by those clear grey

'I saw that at once,' was the prompt reply, and then he left her to his sister's care. But later on in the evening, when she was rested and refreshed, he returned again to the charge.

'I suppose Mr. Calcott has left a great deal of money? I did not read in the paper at what amount his property was

valued, but I suppose it was pretty considerable.'

'Yes; I believe so,' returned Queenie faintly. They were sitting round the open window; the lamp on the centre table cast only a dim light on their faces. Langley had been playing to them, and just now the music had ceased.

'Have you any idea how he has disposed of it? Every

one thought there would be a new wing added to the hospital. He had not a relative in the world belonging to him, except your little sister Emmie.'

'No; and he has left nothing to Emmie,' she returned, thankful that in this she could speak the whole truth. 'Nearly all of it has gone to a stranger, a mere connection. Caleb has an annuity; and I—he has not forgotten me,' shielding her face still more in the darkness. 'Emmie and I will have enough to live on now. I shall not need to give French lessons, or to add in any way to my salary,' blurting out the lesson she had prepared herself to say.

'Will you have enough without the school?' persisted Garth curiously. His keen ear had detected a certain trembling in Queenie's voice. Her agitation had not escaped him, and he was trying in his straightforward way to find out why she was not like herself to-night. 'Do you mean

that your salary is no longer of importance to you?'

'It is not all that we shall have to live on, that is what I meant to say,' she returned hurriedly. 'I shall not have to stint, or be afraid of how we shall make ends meet; there will be enough. Emmie will have little comforts; that is all I care for.'

'I am very glad,' returned Garth gravely; but he questioned her no more. Possibly he expected her further confidence, and was a little disappointed when she withheld it. Neither on that evening nor on any further occasion did he revert to the subject; and Queenie, who began to feel her position an embarrassing one, was glad that the whole matter should be consigned to oblivion.

Cathy's curiosity was much more easily satisfied.

'There, my dream has come true,' she said, embracing her ecstatically when they had retired to their own rooms. 'Why did you not write and tell me about it? Will you

have much, Queen—a whole hundred a year?'

'Yes; I shall have a hundred a year,' returned Queenie, trying not to laugh. When she was away from those keen grey eyes she felt something like a renewal of courage. Her spirits returned; the whole thing appeared to her in the light of a good joke. 'When it comes out, and he asks me the reason of this mystery, I know what I shall tell him,' she

thought, when Cathy had withdrawn, well pleased, and she was left alone for the night. 'I shall tell him that I wanted to remain poor a little longer, and to be liked for myself; that I feared losing the school and the cottage; that it was an innocent whim that could do no one harm, and that would give me a great deal of pleasure,' and when she had settled this point comfortably with herself she composed herself to sleep.

## CHAPTER XXIII

#### WEAVING IN THE SUNSET

'Where waitest thou,
Lady I am to love! Thou comest not;
Thou knowest of my sad and lonely lot;
I look'd for thee ere now!

'It is the May!

And each sweet sister soul hath found its brother;

Only we two seek fondly each the other,

And, seeking, still delay.'—ARNOLD.

QUEENIE entered upon her new duties with an ardour that would have surprised any one acquainted with the real state of the case. If a feeling of amusement sometimes crossed her mind at the incongruity between her present position and the heiress-ship she had refused to take up, it only added zest and flavour to her work.

Queenie Marriott was one of those women whose zeal was according to knowledge. She loved her work for its own sake. In her eyes it was invested with a meaning and dignity that redeemed it from its so-called drudgery, and placed it high in the ranks of honourable labour.

Her youthful enthusiasm anointed everything with a sort of moral chrism. The little barnlike structure, with its half-moon windows, and rough forms and desks, was a species of temple wherein she enshrined all manner of precious things. When she looked round on the children's faces they seemed to appeal to her with all sorts of involved meanings, demanding patience and sympathy, and all such goodly things at her hands.

Queenie knew the royal road to learning lay through her

She must love them, and teach them to love pupils' hearts. her; obedience would follow as a matter of course. children were dear to her, for Emmie's sake. Now and then, through the buzz of voices droning through the repetition lessons, there would come before her a certain vivid memory, stabbing her with sudden, sharp pain—a dark garret haunted with shadows; a pale-faced child crouched on the windowseat, wrapped in an old red shawl, with great blue eyes dim with fear; of a little figure stricken down, and lying amongst them as one that was dead; of a sickroom where a childmartyr went down into the very valley of the shadow of death, where a fight so long and terrible was carried on, that the weary watcher only covered her face with her trembling hands, and prayed for merciful death to come as a deliverer.

And so for the sake of that childish sufferer, and that great miracle of healing - Queenie clave with very love to all There was one child, Prissy Atkinson, the sister of the very Patience whom Langley had selected as her little maid, to whom she showed especial kindness.

She was the plainest and most uninteresting girl in the school, slightly lame, and with an odd drawl and lisp in her voice, ungainly in manner, and with no particular cleverness to recommend her; yet, by some undefinable feeling, Queenie

singled out this child as an object of her interest.

The little rough head often felt a tender hand laid upon it. The gentlest voice Prissy had ever heard would accost her now and then; difficult tasks were smoothed by magic; pleasant smiles would reward her diligence. When her head once ached, a resting-place was found for it on teacher's own shoulder. 'Oh, teacher! I love you! I do love you so!' cried Prissy, out of the fulness of her heart, throwing her thin arms round Queenie's neck. Was the warm kiss that answered her given in reality to Prissy or to Emmie?

Emmie would come sometimes and look in at the open door, with round blue eyes, very wide open with pleasure and astonishment. The little girls would look up from their tasks and nod at her; the sisters would interchange fond. satisfied looks. Sometimes a tall figure would pause for a moment behind Emmie; then a strong arm would draw the child from the threshold.

'Naughty Emmie! infringing the rules in school-hours. Do you know I shall have you put on a form as an example for disobedient children? Why has Langley allowed you to play truant in this way?'

'I ran away from Cathy, down the lane,' Emmie answered, clinging to his hand, and looking up coaxingly into his face. 'I do love to see Queenie amongst them all. Did she not

look nice, Mr. Clayton?'

'Very nice,' returned Garth absently. In reality he was pondering over the little scene he had just witnessed. would make a picture,' he thought; 'the slim, girlish figure in the black dress, the bent brown head, the children's eager faces, the bowl of white narcissus on the desk, the sunshine streaming in at the open door.' She had looked up at him and smiled as he stood there, such a bright smile; somehow it haunted him. 'What a brave, true heart it is,' he thought, as he went down the village with Emmie still clinging closely 'She looked as proud of herself and her work as ever Princess Ida amongst her golden-haired girl-graduates. That is what I like about her; she is superior to the nonsense and conventionality of the present day. Most women would have felt themselves humiliated in her position; but she seems to have grasped the real meaning of her work and purpose. If it were not selfish I could find it in my heart to be half sorry about that legacy. I wanted to see if the bare crust she talked about would have set her teeth on edge in the eating. I had a notion that it would have been pleasant to see her working up her way alone; and then one would have a faint chance of helping her. She is beyond this now; Cathy says he has left her a hundred a year. Why, with her salary and what she has they will have close upon two hundred. They will do capitally on that; and, after all, one would not like to see them pinch. Well, it is none of my business,' finished Garth, rousing himself from his cogitations. 'I wish Dora could have seen her just now, giving that object lesson; I fancy she would have changed her opinion altogether. How strange it was that they did not seem to take to each other; but then women are strange creatures, and difficult to understand.'

It was an odd coincidence that made Garth think of Dora;

for at that moment her little pony-carriage turned the corner of the lane. She waved her whip and her little gloved hand as she saw him; and Garth crossed the road with a slight flush on his face.

'I wanted to see Miss Marriott. I promised to call upon her; but I find the cottage is still unoccupied,' said Miss Cunningham, leaning a little towards him, and fixing her calm blue eyes on his face. Not a look or gesture escaped her scrutiny. His slight confusion at her unexpected appearance was perfectly transparent to her. 'Things are going on as they ought to go on,' she said to herself; 'but there is no need to hurry it;' and though her pulses quickened a little at his obvious pleasure at seeing her she would have scorned to betray her interest.

'They do not go in until Tuesday; we shall keep them until then,' returned Garth, stroking the pony's neck absently. Dora was looking prettier than ever this morning, he thought. She wore a hat with a long, white curling feather; the golden hair shone under it; she patted it nonchalantly with her little gloved hand as she talked. Emmie interrupted them presently.

'School is over! there are the girls coming out. Prissy is last, of course. Ah! there is Queenie!' and she darted across the road, and almost threw herself on her sister. Queenie did not quicken her steps when she saw them. She came up a little reluctantly when she recognised the occupant of the pony-carriage.

Dora greeted her with her usual good-humour.

'Ah, there you are, Miss Marriott! how cool you look in that nice, broad-brimmed hat. But I am sorry to see you in black. You have lost a friend, Mr. Clayton tells me. Well, I told you that I should call and have a chat about the school and all manner of things. Will you jump in and let me drive you up the lane? Langley has promised me some luncheon.'

'Emmie and I will be at the house as soon as you,' returned Queenie, taking the child's hand and walking on swiftly. Miss Cunningham meant to be kind, she was sure of that; why was it that her manner always irritated her? There was a flavour of patronage in it that galled her sensi-

tiveness. 'Perhaps if she knew I had five thousand a year she might change her tone,' thought Queenie, a little wrathfully. 'I never find it difficult to get on with people; and yet in my heart I cannot like her. Why will she make it her business to poach on other people's manor? The Hepshaw school is my affair, and has nothing to do with Crossgill Vicarage.'

Miss Cunningham seemed to think otherwise. She cross-examined Queenie all through luncheon on a hundred petty details. Queenie, to her surprise, found she was acquainted with many of the girls' names and histories. She put the new mistress right on one or two points with much shrewdness and cleverness. She could talk, and talk well, on most subjects. By and by, when the school was exhausted, she turned to Garth, and argued quite a knotty point of politics with him, elucidating her view with a clear-headedness and force of words that surprised her feminine hearers.

Garth had much ado to hold his own against her, but the consciousness of being in the right gave him the advantage.

'Now, Miss Dora, I think you must yield this once,' he said, looking at her triumphantly. Dora measured him with

her glance before she answered.

'I never yield to papa, but I suppose I must to you,' she said in the quietest manner possible, and there was a slight stress on the last word that made Garth redden as though he had received an unexpected concession.

He placed himself at her side when they went into the garden after luncheon, and appeared determined to monopolise her attention; but this did not seem to suit Miss Cunningham, for she called Cathy to her, and the two commenced a conversation in which he soon found himself excluded. Once or twice, when he turned restive under this treatment, and seemed to incline to seek conversation in a little talk with Queenie, a soft glance from Dora's blue eyes recalled and kept him stationary.

'All this is so uninteresting to you gentlemen, you like politics better,' she said presently in a low voice, as though appealing for pardon; 'if you will gather me a few flowers, Mr. Clayton, I shall soon have finished my talk with Cathy, and then we will take a turn down the plane-tree walk; it

looks so cool and shady.' But when the flowers were tastefully arranged, and Garth, with a little look of triumph, threw open the gate for her to pass through, Dora still held Cathy's arm.

It was not quite as enjoyable as Garth had fancied it would be. Dora was all amiability and sweetness; she had the roses in her hands, and touched them tenderly from time to time. She tripped beside him, holding up her pretty white dress with one hand, the other rested lightly on Cathy's arm. Her blue eyes looked yearningly at him and the sunset together.

'How calm and still everything looks. I think I love this old walk better than any place in the world. It reminds me of old days, Mr. Clayton, when you and I and Cathy

used to walk here.'

'When we were children we used to say that two were company and three none,' responded Garth sulkily. The hint was so obvious that Cathy would at once have made her escape, but Dora tightened her grasp on her arm with a slightly heightened colour.

'That depends on one's company. One could never find Cathy in the way,' she said, with a little infusion of tender-

ness in her voice.

'Never! can you imgaine no possible circumstances in which a duet would be preferable?' questioned Garth, turning on her so abruptly that Dora, for all her coolness, was non-plussed for the moment. What was he going to say? With all her prudence she felt alarmed and fluttered, but the thought of her girls calmed her into soberness again.

'I never was good at guessing riddles,' she returned, not perusing the gravel at her feet as some girls would have done in her place, but looking full at him with unblenching eyes. 'Just now a trio suits me best, that is all I meant.'

'Pshaw,' he muttered, turning angrily away. Was she fooling him after all? He was not a man who would ever understand coquetry or caprice; such things would have simply disgusted him; but then he knew Dora was no coquette. 'She is trying to manage me for some purpose of her own; she wants me to come to a certain point and no farther; she is showing me very plainly what she means,'

he said to himself, repulsed and yet attracted in spite of himself by this strange conduct. After all the plane-tree walk and the sunset, now he had them, were failures. He had not once this evening called her Dora. How could he, with Cathy walking there beside them, and noting his discomfiture with her keen girlish eyes? True, he had not known what he would have said to her if they had been alone; sentiment was only just waking up in Garth's nature. A week or two ago he would have pronounced himself heartwhole, would have laughed at the notion of his being in love. Why had a sudden fancy come to him for golden hair and sunsets, and quiet evening strolls? Was he feeling dimly after some thing? was this restlessness, this undefinable longing after some visionary ideal, a part of the disease?

Garth could not have answered these questions if his life depended on it. He had ceased to be satisfied with his sisters' company. A craving after some new excitement made itself very plainly felt at this time. His pulses were throbbing with fresh life; the world was before him, the young man's world; he had only to look round him and choose. Strong, keen-eyed, vigorous, with dominant will and sober judgment, what obstacle need he dread? what impediments could he

not overcome?

Hitherto freedom, and the mystery obscuring his future fate, had had a strange charm in Garth's eyes. It had pleased him to know that such things were for him when he should stoop and open his hand to receive the best gift of heaven. 'I suppose I shall fall in love some day, every one does; but there is plenty of time for that sort of thing,' he often said to his sisters, and there had been an amused look upon his face, as though the notion pleased him.

But, in spite of his young man's conceit, Garth had an old-fashioned reverence in speaking on such subjects. It would not be too much to say that he stood, as it were, bare-headed on holy ground. One evening, shortly after Queenie's return from Carlisle, Cathy had been repeating to them scraps of poetry as they sat round the open window in the twilight, and by and by she commenced in a low voice reciting some quaint old lines of Arnold, in which this craving for an unknown love is most touchingly depicted.

## WEAVING IN THE SUNSET

'Thou art as I—
Thy soul doth wait for mine, as mine for thee;
We cannot live apart; must meeting be
Never before we die?

'Dear soul, not so!

That time doth keep for us some happy years,

That God hath portion'd out our smiles and tears,

Thou knowest, and I know.

'Yes, we shall meet!

And therefore let our searching be the stronger:

Dark days of life shall not divide us longer,

Nor doubt, nor danger, sweet!

Therefore I bear
This winter-tide as bravely as I may,
Patiently waiting for the bright spring-day
That cometh with thee, dear.'

'How beautiful!' sighed Langley. 'I have always been so fond of those lines. Your new song, "My Queen," embodies the same meaning, Cathy.' But Garth said nothing; he only sat for a long time shading his eyes with his hand, and there was a certain moved look on his face when he uncovered it as though he had been strongly affected.

But ever since that evening the restlessness had grown upon him, and there had been a certain carping fastidiousness in his manner to his sisters; and once or twice he had used Dora's name as a sort of reproach. 'If you were only as good a manager as Miss Cunningham, Langley;' or 'I wish you would read more, and choose your books as sensibly as Miss Dora does, Cathy.'

Langley took her rebuke meekly and in silence; but Cathy treated her brother to a contemptuous shrug and a disdainful look.

'Dora; I am sick of Dora. Every one sees how that will end,' she said in a vexed voice, when they had come in from the garden, and she had followed her friend upstairs. 'When that happens I suppose we shall all be managed into our graves.'

'Oh, don't!' exclaimed Queenie, with a sudden accent of

pain, and becoming somewhat pale over her words. 'She is not good enough for him—for your brother.'

'She is too good, you mean. I hate such faultless people. Dora is never in the wrong; she is a pattern daughter, a pattern sister, a model housekeeper, and unexceptionable in all parochial and social duties; the work she gets through would astonish your weak mind.'

'And then she is so clever.'

'Clever! she is a perfect paragon of learning. She educated her sisters until they went to Brussels. Then she is no mean musician; she works beautifully too, and copies out all her father's sermons. I am not sure she does not write them as well.'

'Ah! now I can see you are joking.'

'My dear, Dora is no joking matter, I can assure you; she and her goodness together are very ponderous affairs. Do you think Garth does not know all this? Why he and Dora have been friends ever since they were children.'

'I can see that he respects her most thoroughly.'

'Not more than she respects him; she is always telling us how excellent he is, and what a model to other young men. When I am in a very good humour with Garth, I sometimes repeat these little speeches, only I have come lately to doubt the wisdom of adding fuel to the fire.'

'Surely such perfection must satisfy you as well as him, or you must be difficult to please,' returned Queenie a little sarcastically. A numb, undefinable sort of pain seemed taking possession of her. Would Hepshaw be quite so desirable a place of residence when Dora was mistress of Church-Stile House? this was the question she asked herself. And for the first time the thought of her fortune gave her a positive feeling of pleasure.

'Oh, as to that, I am very fond of Dora,' replied Cathy carelessly; 'she amuses me, and she is very good-natured; and then one must like one's future sister-in-law for the sake of dear old Garth. I only hope she will have the good sense not to try and manage him, for he will never stand it.'

This conversation depressed Queenie somehow, and kept her wakeful and restless; it did not add to her tranquillity to hear Garth's footsteps under her window, crunching the gravel walk, for long after they had retired. It was contrary to his usual habit; it argued disturbance or preoccupation of mind.

Garth's soliloquy would have perplexed both her and

Cathy if they had heard it.

'I wonder if I am in love with Dora after all?' he was asking himself, as he lighted himself a fresh cigar, and then stood leaning against the little gate, looking down the planetree walk. It was moonlight now, and the monuments glimmered in the white light; there were faint, eerie shadows under the dark trees; now and then a night-bird called, or a dog barked from the village, and then stillness gathered

over everything again.

'I wonder if I am really in love, or if I am only arguing myself into it. Now I come to think of it, when I imagined my future wife I always thought of Dora; we have grown up together, and it seems natural somehow; and then I had always a boyish fancy for golden hair. What a pretty little head it is, as well as a wise one. I wish she were not quite so independent, and would lean on a fellow more. I suppose it is the fault of circumstances. Every one depends on her—her father and her sisters. She never had the chance of being helpless like other women. I always think of that and make allowance for her faults.

'Sometimes,' soliloquised the young philosopher as his eigar went out, and he calmly relighted it—'sometimes I'm afraid that if we ever came together I might find her a little masterful and opinionated; that is the danger with capable women, they have their own notions and stick to them. I confess I should like my wife to follow my ideas, and not to be lady paramount in everything; not that even Dora would find it easy to manage me,' continued Garth, with an amused curl of the lip.

'What a nice, sensible little companion she would be for a man,' he resumed presently, after the firm even footsteps had crunched the gravel awhile. 'That is the best of her, she never bores or wearies one; she is always fresh and good-humoured, and ready to take interest in everything, even in the schools, and Miss Marriott, only Miss Marriott repulses her somehow. Her manner vexed me this afternoon; there was a stand-offishness and a reserve in it, as though Dora's interest offended

her. She never appears at her best advantage when Dora is with us. Why am I always comparing those two? somehow I can't help it. Dora interests me most, of course; and yet men who are in love seldom study the pros and cons of character as I have been doing for the last half hour. Certainly some of the symptoms are still lacking, or else I am too matter-offact a fellow to have them. And yet I don't know. What were those lines Cathy repeated the other night? How well the little puss recited them; with such feeling too.

""Thy soul doth wait for mine, as mine for thee; We cannot live apart."

Humph! I am not in love so much as all that, and I don't think Dora is either. I have a doubt whether the "open sesame" has been said to either of us yet; if so, "where waitest thou, lady I am to love?" Well, it is a rare old poem, and touches a fellow up in an extraordinary sort of way. I have got it by heart now, and it haunts me to a droll extent. There, my cigar is out, confound it, so I may as well get rid of all this moonshine and go in. How runs the last verse?—

"Tis the May-light
That crimsons all the quiet college gloom.
May it shine softly in thy sleeping room;
And so, dear wife, good-night."

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE MISTRESS OF BRIERWOOD COTTAGE

'By night we lingered on the lawn,
For underfoot the herb was dry;
And genial warmth; and o'er the sky
The silvery haze of summer dawn;

\*And calm that let the tapers burn Unwavering: not a cricket chirr'd: The brook alone far off was heard, And on the board the fluttering urn.'—Tennyson.

'A PENNY for your thoughts, little Emmie,' cried Garth gaily, a few evenings afterwards, when his abrupt entrance had broken up a somewhat silent group. The child, who was sitting at Langley's feet as usual, with her head in her lap, held up her hand warningly.

'Hush! I was counting them; now I have lost one.'

'Counting what, you small elf?'

'The angels, of course; we have had ever so many passing through the room this evening. Just now Langley sighed and disturbed one. They never come when we talk and laugh, you know,' continued Emmie, with a child's beautiful unreasoning faith in what would seem to older minds a piece of fond superstition. 'I do love a real long silence, when people are all thinking together; the angels have such a good time of it then.'

'What a queer little thinking machine that is,' muttered Ted drowsily; but Garth only patted her head kindly.

It was never his way to laugh at a child's fancies. 'The real germ is hidden in the bud; a mere infant will sometimes

turn our wisdom into foolishness,' he had observed more than once in his graver moments. 'Well, my white May-flower,' he continued, using his pet name for her; 'so the angels

were having it all to themselves this evening, eh?'

'I did not know we were assisting at a séance,' growled Ted, stretching himself; 'we have got a precious small medium, it strikes me. What sort of spirits were they, Emmie, black, white, or grey? I fancied my own familiar, in the shape of an elongated cat, with yellow sparks for eyes, grinned at me with feline and whiskered face from behind the sofa corner. "Avaunt thee, witch," I cried, and with diabolic stare and hiss it vanished.'

'A truce with your nonsense, Ted; you will scare the child.'

'I think we have all been very stupid and silent this evening,' interposed Langley. 'I fancy that we are all sad at the thought of losing Queenie and Emmie from our circle to-morrow.'

'The sofa-cushion is drenched with my tears,' continued Ted, the incorrigible. 'The drip, drip of them was mistaken by Langley for rain. "A wet evening," quoth she; but my sobs prevented me from undeceiving her.'

'Isn't Mr. Ted wicked to tell so many stories in play?'

interrupted Emmie, in a shocked tone.

'Play!' reiterated that remorseless youth, 'is that how you stigmatise an honest grief, and mistaken though blighted devotion? is it nothing to this lacerated heart to know that the beloved heads of the Marriott sisters will rest for the last time to-night beneath our roof? "Quoth the raven, nevermore, rests sweet Marriott at thy door."'

'Oh, shut up, you young idiot,' exclaimed his brother in a

tone of deep disgust.

'He has been so tiresome all day,' observed Cathy; 'he

has not left Queenie and me a moment in peace.'

'Only a lock of hair, and that was refused; even a hairpin would have been prized, or the frayed end of a ribbon; all, all denied.

> "Oh stay, the Clayton said; and yield A withered rose, or weed of field. Indignant glared her bright brown eye, And with a frown she made reply, You botherer."

'Ted, in another moment---'

'You have the heart of a barbarian, Garth; the softer passion is unknown to you—the "pills and paradise" of a man's existence. Look at me, like Etna half consumed, a mighty ruin—all thy work, oh woman! Ah, as the soothing bard, the glorious Will of immortal memory, once wrote—

""He never told his love; no, never;

No more did she, but did you ever,

She gave him one long glance, and then——""

but Ted never finished his ridiculous effusion, for in another moment Garth had pinned him in his powerful grasp, and stretched him prone and struggling on the floor. 'And there shall you lie until you have promised not to spout any more nonsense,' was the inexorable mandate of his tyrant.

'Floored by fate, and crushed by the gigantic hoof of destiny, I submit. "More kicks than halfpence," quoth he, under the healing (heeling) process; but what boots such trifles to the stalwart heart of a young Briton. Alas, thy sole is open and clear to me, my brother, and the footprint of ignoble passion is stamped upon it.'

'Pax, pax,' groaned Garth.

'Oh, leave him alone, you are only making him worse,' laughed Queenie; 'if he sees nobody heeds his nonsense he will soon leave off.'

'I feel like the gladiator, butchered to make a Clayton holiday; my breastbone is staved in by the barbarian. "Dying, we salute thee, Cæsar." Well, it is of "no consequence," as Toots remarks.'

'There, get up and behave yourself,' interrupted Garth, with a final kick; 'and now, to get rid of this foolish fellow, I vote that some of us take a turn in the plane-tree walk. Come, Miss Marriott, you and Cathy put on your hats.' But Cathy, who was in a curious mood to-night, and had done nothing but sigh and interlace her fingers restlessly in the twilight, muttered something about Miss Cosie and the Vicarage, and vanished from the room; and so it came to pass that Queenie found herself gravely pacing up and down the plane-tree walk by Garth's side.

Naturally as it had come about-for no one else had

volunteered to accompany them—the novelty of the circumstance caused them both a little embarrassment; and, by some curious physiological coincidence, each fell to thinking of Dora Cunningham. Garth smoked his cigar meditatively, and cast curious sidelong glances at the slender black figure beside him. Visions of a white dress and golden hair still haunted him. Why was he shy and silent all at once? had he anything in common with this grave, brown-eyed girl? He was wondering, if she were Dora would he have found anything to say to her? He was sorry to think that this was Miss Marriott's last night. Sorry! yes; it made him feel all at once as though the old house had grown suddenly dull and empty; and yet if it had been Dora—

'Miss Marriott, how is it that you and Miss Cunningham don't hit it off better?' he said, so abruptly that Queenie started and changed colour. She was feeling very heavy-hearted, poor little soul, to think it was her last night at Church-Stile House; and how she would miss the slow, even tramp of Garth's footsteps under her windows, and the red end of his cigar emerging from the trees every ten minutes. She had often sat and watched it with unconscious interest even to herself; she was loath to part with that, and his cheery good-morning when she looked out to smell the roses.

She was just wondering how much he would miss her, and whether her absence would leave any perceptible gap in the family circle; and this question jarred upon her with sudden discord.

'What do you mean?' she asked faintly, conscious all at once of a certain chilliness round the region of the heart. She had hoped for a few words of friendly interest and advice on her own affairs to-night. Had he only brought her out there to talk of Dora Cunningham?

'Why don't you two girls get on better together?' pursued Garth inexorably. He was quite aware of the reluctance of Queenie's tone as she answered him, but the opportunity was a good one, and he thought he would have it out with her. She was indebted to him for much kindness, he told himself; his sisters and he had taken her by the hand, and found her occupation, and a roof to cover her head; he had a right to ask, as a return, that she should show a little con-

sideration for him and his friends; and her manner to Dora somehow galled him. Perhaps he was a little curious on the subject as well; anyway, he would have his answer.

'How do you know that we do not?' she replied, fencing in her turn. 'I have not seen Miss Cunningham more than three or four times; we are comparative strangers to each

other.'

'You know her as well as you know Mrs. Fawcett or Miss Faith Palmer; they are all comparative strangers to you, but to them your manner is always so bright and genial.'

'Ah! one cannot help getting on with them.'

'I should have said the same of Miss Cunningham. There, you shake your head; how impossible it is to understand you women. Miss Dora seems so willing to be friendly on her side. She has driven over twice to see you, and tender her advice and help; but one cannot help seeing how these overtures have been repelled.'

'Mr. Clayton, pray don't speak as though you were hurt with me.'

'I do feel a little hurt about this,' he replied gravely; 'at least it disappoints me. You see Dora, I mean Miss Cunningham, has been intimate with us ever since we were children together, and we think so much of her opinion on things. When you came among us, and decided on taking up this new work, I thought at once what a valuable friend you would secure in her.'

'You were very kind,' stammered poor Queenie with downcast eyes.

'Confess that my kindness was thrown away though,' he continued in a lighter tone, for her distress was not lost on him. 'You are such an iceberg in her presence that even her good nature has failed to thaw you. You are never proud with Langley or Cathy, and yet Cathy can say rude things sometimes.'

'I am never proud with those I love.'

'Then you don't mean to love Miss Cunningham.'

'No,' reluctantly; 'but I do not dislike her There is simply no sympathy between us, and her manner jars and irritates me somehow. It seems as though she were trying to keep me down in my place, and make me remember that I

am only the poor schoolmistress in Hepshaw, when, when you all try to make me forget it,' continued the girl, and now the tears rushed to her eyes. Garth had never seen her so moved, but her frankness did not displease him. It might be his duty to give her a little wholesome advice, and to bid her curb that troublesome pride of hers; but, on the whole, he felt

sorry for her.

'I think we ought to be very patient with a person who displeases us, and ask ourselves whether the fault may not lie on our side,' continued her young mentor gravely. He rather liked the right he had assumed of lecturing this girl; the occupation was piquant and interesting, and then she took his rebukes so meekly. 'Miss Cunningham is a very superior person, you cannot fail to own that, I am sure; so many people rely upon her. She is the mainstay at home; her father's right hand in everything; and then her sisters idolise her. She must be truly lovable, or they would not be so fond of her.'

'Mr. Clayton, what does it matter whether we get on together or not?' exclaimed Queenie at this point, stung by all this praise, and sore almost to unhappiness. 'It cannot matter to her, or to you either, whether I like her or not.'

'It matters a good deal to me whether my friends are appreciated. I am disappointed about it, because I wanted to secure you a valuable ally, that is all; but I suppose it cannot be helped. Women are unaccountable beings; it is best, after all, to leave them alone,' and Garth's voice was so full of kindness and regret that Queenie's soreness vanished in a sudden effort of magnanimity.

'I daresay it was my fault; I am sure Miss Cunningham meant to be kind,' she faltered out hurriedly. 'Only when one is poor, one is proud and sensitive over little things. Don't say anything more about it, Mr. Clayton; I mean to like her. I will like her, and you shall not have reason to

complain of my disagreeable manner again.'

'No; not disagreeable, only cold, he returned, with a smile of genuine content, for this admission pleased him well. They had stopped simultaneously at the little gate, and Queenie made a movement as though to go in, but he would not suffer it. 'No; you shall not leave me in this way, we

will have another turn,' he said cheerfully. 'Let us talk of something else—of yourself and your plans. Do you know, I feel quite dull at the thought of losing you and Emmie tomorrow. I wonder how much you intend to miss us.'

'More than I ever missed any one in my whole life before,' was the answer on Queenie's lips, but she prudently forbore to utter it, as she moved again by his side in the darkness. Did no warning monitor within her whisper that this man was growing dangerously dear to her; that the snare was already spread for her unconscious feet?

'He means to marry Dora; but I have a right to claim him still as my friend. No one shall steal his friendship from me. I will have what belongs to me,' she had said to herself, almost fiercely; but the falseness of the sophistry was glossed over and hidden from her eyes. For the last few days a great sadness had crept over her. Since the evening Dora had passed through the little gate, and had walked with him up and down in the sunset, some visionary hope, baseless and unsubstantial as a dream, had vanished from her heart.

Of what avail was her idle whim now? Would it not have been better, so she told herself, to have shaken off the dust of Hepshaw from her feet? Whose blame was it if she had tangled her own life? Some impulse, some undefinable influence, had drawn her to weave these strange plans of hers; more than a girl's fancy and love of mystery and adventure were wrapped up in them. But might it not be that bitter failure and remorse should be her portion hereafter?

Would there not have been greater peace and safety for her in that house in Carlisle? Queenie asked herself these questions with a sigh long after she had left Garth, and retired to her own room, where Emmie was slumbering peacefully. She kissed the child, and placed herself under the shadow of the window-curtain, and watched, for the last time, the tiny red spark emerging every now and then from under the trees.

'Miss him! he little knows how I shall miss him!' she said to herself bitterly. 'Right or wrong, he has got into my life, and I cannot get him out. Does he love Dora, I wonder? I cannot make up my mind; but he will marry her, for all that; and then, then, if I find it very hard to bear, if she will not let me keep him as a friend, we will go away, Emmie

and I, somewhere a long way off, where I can have plenty of work, and forget, and begin afresh.'

But when Queenie came to this point she suddenly broke down; an oppressive sense of loneliness, as new as it was terrible, crushed on her with overwhelming force. For the first time Queenie's brave spirit seemed utterly broken, and some of the bitterest tears she ever shed wetted the child's pillow.

As for Garth, he strolled on for a long time, placidly enjoying his cigar. He had delivered his little lecture, and had then sent the girl in soothed and comforted; so he told himself. It is true a sad and wistful glance from two large dark eyes somewhat haunted him at intervals, but he drove it persistently away.

'She is a sweet girl, a very sweet girl; but she has her faults, like all of us,' he said to himself. 'I am glad I put her right about Dora. If Dora ever comes here, it would not do for Miss Marriott not to be friendly with her. Dora would have a right to expect then that the others should give way to her, if she ever comes here as my wife;' and here the young man's pulses quickened a little, and in the darkness the hot blood rushed to his face. 'Dora my wife! how strange it sounds! Well, I suppose it will come to that some day; things seem shaping themselves that way. She will expect it, and her father too, after what has passed. I fancy there is a kind of understanding between us. I wonder what sort of feeling she has for me? She keeps a fellow at such a distance, there is no finding out; but I'll master her yet. She will soon find out, if I once make up my mind, that I am not one to bear any shilly-shallying. I don't think I could stand nonsense from any woman, not even from Dora. Her father told me once that if he died Dora would not have a penny, though the other girls have tidy little sums, each of them. like her all the better for that. Well, after all there is no hurry. Being in love is all very well, but it is better to take life easily, and digest matters a little;' and with a conscious laugh that sounded oddly to him in the darkness, Garth swung back the little gate, and walked towards the house.

It was arranged that the sisters' modest luggage should be sent over to the cottage in the course of the morning, and that Queenie should take possession of her new abode as soon as her afternoon duties were discharged, and that Cathy and Emmie should be there to receive her.

'I am to pour out tea my own self, and Cathy has promised to make some of her delicious cakes,' exclaimed Emmie rapturously. 'Langley will not come, though I have begged her over and over again; she says we three will be so much cosier together.'

Queenie nodded and smiled as she bade her little sister good-bye, and trudged down the lane. The sun was shining brightly; a rose-laden wind blew freshly in her face; with the morning light courage and hope had returned; she felt half ashamed of her last night's sadness. Queenie was young, and life was strong within her. In youth happiness is a necessity, a second nature. When the heart is young it rebels fiercely against sorrow. To exist is to hope; to hope is to believe.

In youth we believe in miracles; utterly impossible combinations would not surprise us; the sun must stand still in our firmament, the stars in their courses fight against Sisera; what has happened to others cannot happen to us.

It is only bitter experience that tears down this fairy glamour, the thin, gossamer film through which we so long looked. How barren and loveless life appears then! Our fairest hopes are shipwrecked; a moral earthquake has shattered our little world. We look up at the heavens, and they are as brass, and the earth under our feet as wrought iron; while beyond, and in the dim horizon, hollow voices seem to whisper a perpetual dirge.

It is a terrible subject, this awful mystery of pain, this dim and inscrutable decree, that man is born to trouble. Ah, well for those who, like that tired wanderer in that far-off land, can discern in their darkness and loneliness the ladder that reaches from earth to heaven, and feel the fanning of invisible wings even in their heaviest stupor.

Queenie's healthy young nature recoiled and shuddered at the first touch of probable pain; it lay folded like a troublesome nightmare far back among her thoughts. It had mastered her last night in the darkness; this morning the sunshine had chased it away. 'How do I know? how does any one know?' she said to herself, somewhat ambiguously, as she sat among her children that morning. 'I may be wrong; it may never happen; and if it does, what is, is best, I suppose,' and here she sighed. 'I am thinking of him, of them both, too much. After all, what is he to me? a dear friend, a very dear friend; but my friendship must not cost me too much. I will be good and reasonable, and not ask more than a fair amount of happiness; it is only children who cry for the moon.'

If you want to be happy, be good, is a very safe maxim. Queenie felt quite bright as she walked through the little town. True, she had a slight qualm as she passed the turning that led to Church-Stile House; but she bravely stifled the feeling, and hummed an air as she opened her own little gate.

How fresh and bright it all looked. The walk was new gravelled, the little lawn looked trim and green; roses and geraniums bloomed under the windows; a honeysuckle was nicely trained round the porch. Emmie met her on the threshold, and dragged her in with both hands.

'O, Queen, it is all so lovely; just like a bit out of a story-book. To think of you and me living alone together in our own little cottage; only you and me!'

'I am so glad you are happy, darling, because that makes me happy,' returned her sister affectionately. 'Ah, there is our little maid Patience,' as the girl stood curtseying and smoothing down her clean apron, with a pleased, excited face. 'Cathy—O, Mr. Clayton, are you here too?' as Garth's dark handsome face suddenly beamed on her from the little parlour.

'I could not resist the pleasure of showing you the transformation,' he returned gaily. 'You hardly know the place, do you? Langley and Cathy have done wonders. It is a pretty little home after all, and quite big enough for you two, and I hope you will be as happy as the day is long.'

'Oh, what have you all done!' exclaimed Queenie, in a stifled voice. Her heart began to beat more quickly, an odd, choking feeling was in her throat. Was this their thought for her? She could not for her life have spoken another word as she followed Garth and Cathy into the parlour.

'We have only put a table and some chairs into the front room; it will be handy for Emmie to learn her lessons and play there. Langley knew we must not put you to any unnecessary expense,' went on Garth cheerfully. 'This is very snug, is it not?'

Snug! Queenie looked round her half dazed. Had she ever seen this room before? Though it was summer, a little fire burnt in the grate. There was a crimson carpet; a grey rug was spread invitingly; a couch stood by the open window. There was a bird-cage, and a stand of flowers. A pretty print hung over the mantelpiece. Some book-shelves with some tempting-looking volumes had been fitted up over the corner cupboard. A gay little pink and white tea-service was on the round table. Some low basket-work chairs gave an air of comfort.

Outside the transformation was still more marked. Instead of the green wilderness, all docks and nettles, there was a long green lawn. A broad gravel path bordered the window; a few flowerbeds had been cut in the turf.

'It is too late to do much this season; we shall have it very pretty next summer,' observed Garth, in a cool, matter-of-fact tone, as he followed her to the window. 'We have cut away a good deal of the turf, as it made the house so damp; the gravel path is far better. Cathy wants you to have a rockery and some ferns in one corner.'

'It will look very nice,' returned Queenie absently.

She had a misty vision after that of a bright little kitchen that reminded her of a doll-house that she had had as a child, and then of two bedrooms, one for herself, and one for Emmie, with a small room for Patience, all as fresh as white dimity could make them. There were flowers on the toilettable; the little painted chest of drawers had a sweet perfume of lavender. Everything was simple and well chosen, and testified to thoughtful and loving hands.

'O, Cathy, what am I to say to him? what am I to say to you all?' exclaimed poor Queenie, feeling ready to throw her arms round her friend's neck and burst into tears. They were standing in the little entry, and Garth was watching them.

'Aren't you going to give me tea after all this?' he

interposed, in a droll voice. 'Here I have been gardening and carpentering and acting as odd man to the establishment for I do not know how long.'

'Tea! oh, I forgot,' returned Queenie, dashing the tears

from her eyes, and hurrying to her place.

Garth stood near her a moment as he brought her one of the basket chairs.

'Does our work satisfy you? have we given you pleasure?' he asked, looking into her downcast face rather anxiously. 'Do you think you will be happy here, you and Emmie, in your own little home?'

'It will be my own fault if I am not,' she faltered, holding out her hand; and such a look of pure childish gratitude lit her dark eyes that the young man reddened and turned aside. 'O, Mr. Clayton, what can I do to repay you and Langley?'

'Hush,' he replied lightly, and trying to turn it off with a laugh; 'there is no talk of payment between friends; it is all understood between us. You are only in our debt a little while; besides, you are a rich woman now.'

'Oh, I forgot,' she exclaimed in such a tone of dismay that the others looked quite startled. 'I mean—ah, yes, it will all be right soon,' endeavouring to recover herself.

It was a cosy little meal after all. Garth, who saw that Queenie's fluctuating spirits needed tranquillising, set himself to reassure and soothe her; and when he had succeeded, the three had one of their long thoughtful talks. By and by Langley came, and then Ted, and filled the little room to overflowing, so that they betook themselves to the porch and the lawn.

It was quite late when they separated, and Queenie went up to her new little room. The glimmering lights in the village had been extinguished. The roads looked white and still in the moonlight; only a faint barking from a dog in the distance broke the stillness.

'How wrong and wicked I was last night!' thought the girl humbly, as she stood by the table, touching Langley's roses with caressing fingers. 'I was lonely and sad; I wanted I cannot tell what. But to-night it is so different; it is so sweet to feel he has done all this for me; that it is his thought for me as well as theirs; that, whatever happens he will be my friend, always my friend.'

## CHAPTER XXV

# FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM

'She prayed me not to judge their cause from her,
That wrong'd it, sought far less for truth than power
In knowledge; something wild within her breast,
A greater than all knowledge, beat her down.'
TENNYSON'S Princess.

THE days passed very tranquilly and pleasantly after this for the inhabitants of the cottage.

Queenie had regained her brightness in a great measure. In spite of a certain dim fear that haunted the background of her memory, her life seemed full of a strange, sweet excitement. The buoyancy of youth was strong within her; the knowledge of her secret wealth gave an intoxicating flavour to everything. As she walked to and fro to her daily work, she felt like a disguised princess, like the heroine of some fairy story she had read once, spinning in her woollen garments among the simple peasant folk. 'I like being a rich woman after all,' she said to herself, 'it is so amusing. I feel just like Cinderella before the pumpkin coach arrives; it is a story-book sort of life I am leading. Fancy teaching in a village school when one has five thousand a year. What shall I do with it all, I wonder; I wish I might give some to Langley and Cathy.'

Queenie used to build all sorts of impossible castles in the air when she was by herself or with Emmie.

'What would you say if we were to be rich one day, very, very rich?' she would ask sometimes; but Emmie only shook her fair head.

'Rich, so that we should be obliged to leave this dear

interposed, in a droll voice. 'Here I have been gardening and carpentering and acting as odd man to the establishment for I do not know how long.'

'Tea! oh, I forgot,' returned Queenie, dashing the tears from her eyes, and hurrying to her place.

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bear to think of it even now,' pressing the child's slight figure closer in her arms.

'It would not be so dreadful now; I should not feel that you were quite so lonely, I mean. No, I will not talk any more about it,' catching sight of Queenie's averted face; 'we will never be sad, you and I, never.

'I wonder if we shall always live alone,' she went on, while Queenie dried her eyes. 'Perhaps one day you will marry—people do, you know. How strange that will be!'

'Should you dislike that idea very much, Emmie?'

'I-I don't know,' in a reluctant tone. 'It will spoil

things rather; but if you like it, Queen---'

'Hush,' kissing her, 'I think we are talking dreadful nonsense. Don't you know that I have told you that we are leading a story-book life, Emmie; first in that dreadful old garret, and now in our pretty cottage? By and by it may turn into a palace; who knows?'

'Ah, then the prince will come; he always does in fairy

stories.'

'No; he will ride away with the golden-haired princess; they will disappear into the forest together, and never come back. We will have Caleb and Molly to live with us instead.'

'Ah, that would be nice,' returned the child, clapping her hands. 'Only keep it the cottage; we don't want the palace,

Queen. Is the prince never to come back then?'

'Of course not; would you have him leave his fair one with the golden locks? Fie, Emmie; what a perfidious prince! They will go riding on and on for ever in the enchanted forest, while you and I are walking hand in hand down the long white road that people call life.'

'What a funny idea! I like the wood best, Queenie.'

'Ah, so do most people,' she returned, rising with a sigh; 'but perhaps we do not know what is best for us. Don't you recollect the story we once read of the child who wanted the star, and missed all the flowers that grew under its feet, and so pined away, and died of unfulfilled longing? You and I will be wiser than that, little one; we will leave the star to move in its own particular orbit, and gather all the sweet homely flowers that grow in our way;' and Queenie.

heaved another little sigh, for she was moralising to herself as well as to Emmie.

It was not often that the sisters were alone. Cathy spent all her leisure hours at the cottage, and even Langley would often bring her work and sit with them in the porch of an evening. Garth too was a frequent visitor; he would come down the lane of an evening, and lean against the little gate for half an hour at a time. Sometimes he would come in and help the sisters with their gardening, and bring them

little gifts of fruit and flowers.

When Langley or Cathy were there he would join the little group in the porch, and linger beside them for hours, but never when they were alone. Often Ted would saunter in and trail his lazy length in one of the basket-work chairs. On these occasions Queenie would whisper to her little sister, and by and by there would be a dainty repast set out for them of milk and fruit and cakes. How pretty and homelike their little parlour looked then, with its soft shaded lamp and bowl of roses! Sometimes the moonlight would stream in at the uncurtained window; one or two large grey moths would wheel round their heads. Garth would go and smoke his cigar on the broad gravel walk outside, while the girls talked softly within! Sometimes Mr. Logan would walk across and assist at these simple festivities, or Miss Cosie trip down the road with a grey shawl pinned over her curls; for the cottage was decidedly popular.

'Cathy, what makes you so quiet with Mr. Logan now?'
Queenie asked her one afternoon when they were sitting

together.

Emmie was spending the evening with the Fawcetts. Captain Fawcett had called for her, and the two had gone off as usual hand in hand, the Captain glancing over his stiff stock at his little companion.

Mr. Logan had looked in on them on his way to the school, and had brought them a message from Miss Cosie.

'Charlotte wants you both to come over to tea with her; she has a present of fine fruit from the Abbey farm, and she wants our friends to enjoy it with her. Miss Faith is coming, and so is Langley, and Garth has promised to look in by and by.'

Queenie assented cheerfully; she had a warm liking for Mr. Logan, and a great affection for Miss Cosie, and nothing pleased her better than an evening spent in their company. It struck her that Cathy acquiesced rather unwillingly in the arrangement; she made one or two excuses rather ungraciously, but Mr. Logan would take no denial.

'Never mind all that; Charlotte and I will quite expect

you. Miss Catherine,' was his tranquil answer.

Cathy flushed in a displeased manner, but she offered no more objections. A cloud settled on her brow now as Queenie spoke.

'You and he used to be such friends,' she continued. 'Don't you remember our talks in the garret? You used to call him your mentor, and write such long letters to him sometimes; a word from him always seemed to influence you, and now it seems to me as though you tried to avoid him.'

Cathy bit her lip and remained silent.

'Dear Cathy, it is so strange, so unlike you to quarrel with your best friend. The more I see Mr. Logan, the more I honour and revere him. Such intellect, and yet the simplicity and guilelessness of a child. I believe he lives only to do good. He reminds one of those olden saints of whom one reads.'

Cathy's dark eyes flashed, and then grew humid with repressed feeling.

'Ah, that is just it; one cannot breathe in such a rarefied

atmosphere.'

'Do you mean that you find his goodness so oppressive? I am not like you then. A really good man rests me somehow. I feel in looking at one as if I were in the presence of God's highest work, as though even He could do nothing better—the best and finished work before the seventh day's rest, when "God saw that it was good." Think of that, Cathy. I suppose,' continued Queenie reverently, 'He saw the one Divine likeness stamped on the face of humanity, the one Man shining through the ages of men. Oh, there is nothing grander in all creation than a really good man.'

'Don't, Queenie; I am not in a mood for your great thoughts to-night; you must come down and meet me on my own level. You don't know how inconceivably little and mean and insignificant he makes me feel. I begin,' enunciating her words with an effort, 'to feel afraid of myself and him.'

'Afraid of Mr. Logan! what nonsense, Catherina mia. Why a child, the very poorest and most miserable child, would slip its little hand in his fearlessly, and be soothed and comforted by the mere contact.'

'A child, ah, yes; but I am a woman,' returned Cathy,

almost inaudibly.

'You are a girl, and so am I, which means we are faulty, imperfect creatures, full of fads and fancies, and brimful of mischief I daresay. Do you think a man like Mr. Logan, who knows human nature, expects us to be perfection?'

'No; but he expects us to grow up to him, and live and breathe in his atmosphere. But I can't, Queenie; I have tried, I have tried so hard to be good, but it stifles me; I feel just as I do when I am teaching the children in one of those close cottages, as though I must rush out and get some air, or I shall be suffocated.'

'Why do you undervalue yourself so?' returned her friend, looking at her affectionately. 'You have got into the habit; it is such a pity, and it spoils you so. I think you good, and you are good.' But Cathy only pushed the dark locks back from her face, and looked disconsolate.

'What constitutes goodness, I wonder?' continued Queenie reflectively. 'We are simple everyday folk; we cannot all be saints. In every age there will be giants in the land. You and I, dear old Cath, must be content with being "the little ones."'

'Ah, you are nearer his standard than I,' in a low, bitter voice.

'It must be a painfully low one then. For shame, when you know all my faults as well as you know your own. I for one will always believe in you. You have such a great heart, Cathy; you would lay down your life for those you love.'

'You are right there.'

'Is unselfishness so common a virtue in this world that one can afford to despise it? How often have I admired your thorough honesty, your hatred of anything crooked and mean. There is nothing little about you, that is why I care for you so much.'

'All pagan virtues,' with a faint smile.

'Cathy, your self-depreciation is incorrigible.'

'I tell you what I mean to do,' rousing herself, but speaking in the same suppressed voice. 'I want to go away from here; this little corner of the world stifles me. I get so tired of it all, the trying to be good and keep down my restlessness, I mean. I have so few home duties; Langley and Garth do not really want me. I should not be much missed.'

'You would leave me and Emmie!' incredulously.

'Poor old Madam Dignity. It does seem hard, I know. Never mind, I should come back to you all the better and the happier for having worked off my superfluous steam. One must have a safety-valve somewhere.'

'But, Cathy, you are surely not serious. I cannot see any reason for this absurd restlessness; you must throw it off,

fight against it, as other women do.'

'My dear oracle, there are women and women. I really believe there is a little of the savage about me; I do so object to be tamed down, and made submissive to mere conventionality. Perhaps my great-grandmother was a Pawnee or a Zingaree; I must ask Garth. I don't feel completely Saxon or Celtic.'

'How can you talk so wildly!'

'Grandmamma Wolf, what great eyes you have got. Don't eat me up in your fiery indignation. Seriously, Queen, don't you think it would be good for me to go away for a time?'

'Are you so anxious to leave us all?' regretfully, but

moved by a certain passionate pain in the girl's face.

'I think I am. Yes, though I shall half break my heart over it. I think I am. You see, I am not like other girls. I cannot lead a quiet, humdrum life that means nothing and leads to nowhere—that is just it. I want to see the world, to rub up against other folk, and study their characters and idiosyncrasies; to have a life of my own to live, not tagged on to other people.'

'But women cannot choose their own life. It always seems to me that their fate is decided for them,' interrupted

Queenie, in a puzzled tone.

'Not for my sort of women. Thank Heaven I am still

myself enough to decide my own fate. No, I am not crazy, Queen,' as her friend looked at her with a sorely perplexed countenance; 'my plan is a very reasonable and sensible one. I have an idea that my vocation is nursing; not stupid sort of illnesses, but downright hard hospital nursing—broken limbs, and accidents, and horrible fever cases; real horrors, not imaginary, mind. Nervous or hypochondriacal patients, no, thank you; Catherine Clayton will have nothing to say to them.'

'Go on,' was the injunction, in a resigned voice, as Cathy

paused to collect her breath.

'Miss Faith and I have had a long talk about it; she is not sceptical like you, she knows too well how bad this sort of restlessness is to bear; besides, she has tried it herself, and loves the work.'

'Yes, I can understand such a life suiting Miss Faith; she is one of those ministering women born to smooth sick pillows. But you, Cathy,' trying hard to repress a smile.

'I grant you that I might deal the aforesaid pillow an occasional thump if my patient should prove refractory; but all the same, I feel as though bandages and blisters were my vocation. I have theories about nursing that would astonish your weak mind. I believe a nurse requires as thorough an education, as careful a training, as any medical student. Miss Faith is quite of my opinion; she advises me to go to London.'

'I did not know Miss Faith was your confidante,' in a

slightly hurt voice.

'Only in this one thing, my dear Madam Dignity,' with a penitent squeeze. 'She said London, and I said "Amen." Garth knows the house surgeon at St. Thomas's, and the matron is a great friend of Langley's; that makes it so easy to carry out my plan.'

'Cathy, I do believe that you are serious.'

'I am glad you have spoken a sensible word at last.

'The work will be most revolting.'

'Do you think that will daunt me? Are not women sent into the world to minister and relieve pain?'

'The labour will be excessive, and trying in the extreme,' persisted Queenie. 'Have you ever seen the wards of a

hospital? I believe you will soon sicken and droop for your northern home.'

'Pshaw! I should scorn to be such a coward; half measures are not to my taste.'

'That is all very well now; but when you are weak and

unnerved by watching.'

'I am thankful to say I don't know what nerves are, my dear. A healthy mind and body are the first requisites for a good nurse. Just as indecision is fatal to a general's success, so would nervousness ruin the best trained nurse. Even Garth owns that as far as that goes my physique is perfect.'

'Do you mean that you have already spoken to him?'

in aghast voice.

'Yes; and to Langley too. They were surprised of course, and rather incredulous, but they do not thoroughly oppose my project. Langley has told Garth more than once that our quiet home life will never suit me. Langley is a wise woman, Queen.'

'And you have communicated your plan to all but me,' very sadly. 'What has become of our old confidence, Cathy?'

'Hush! there speaks jealousy, not my Queen. If I did not tell you, it was because I would not harass you with half-digested plans. I could do nothing without Garth's and Langlev's consent.'

'They have given it then ?'

'Not yet; but I know they will. You see, my demands were very moderate. I told Garth my views: that every woman should have a definite work or trade, and that it should, if possible, be self-supporting; that teaching was not to my taste, but that nursing was. And then I asked his permission to go up to London for a six months' trial. Could there be anything more sensible?'

'But did they not question you about your reason? No, Cathy, do not turn away from me; am I not your friend?

can I not see that you are unhappy?'

'I shall not be unhappy if I can once get away from here and taste freedom; when I am no longer straitened, thralled, in bondage. No, Queenie, dear, indeed I have told you all that I know about myself; there is nothing more to tell. Hush! here comes Miss Faith; not a word of this before

her. I am tired of the subject; your scepticism has quite exhausted me.'

'Cathy, Cathy, what an incomprehensible being you are!' sighed Queenie, as she ran off to fetch her broad-brimmed hat.

Miss Faith had come to fetch them to the Vicarage. Her quiet face brightened at the sight of the girls. An evening's pleasure, a simple tea-drinking with her friends, was an unwonted event in her colourless life.

'It was so good of Cara to spare her a whole evening, just when they were finishing the last chapter of Trench's Parables, and she wanted her to begin Bossuet's life. It was very unselfish of Cara,' she went on, smoothing down the soft grey merino, with its fresh lace ruffles; for Miss Faith was not without her pet vanities, and fine lace ruffles round the neck and wrists were her special weakness.

As they crossed the road Garth emerged from the lane that led to Church-Stile House. A gleam of pleasure over-

spread his face as he greeted them.

'Good evening, Miss Faith; what an age it is since we have seen you. How are the rest of the cardinal virtues? and what new book-torture is Miss Charity inflicting on you? By the bye, ladies, have you heard the wonderful intelligence? the new doctor has made his appearance.'

'No; oh, tell us all about it!' exclaimed the three. 'Who is he? What is his name? Is he young and nice-looking; or is he old, and stout, and horridly uninteresting?' this

last from Cathy.

Garth looked benignantly at their agitated countenances. Their curiosity imparted a relish to the news. Here he had been in possession of the latest intelligence for at least half an hour; had met the newcomer with Mr. Logan, and had shaken hands with him; had discussed the weather and the crops, after the usual manner of Englishmen, while Hepshaw was buried in profound ignorance of the acquisition it had gained.

- 'So you have not heard the news?' he repeated calmly.
- 'No; of course not. Do be quick, Garth. Who is he?'

'Ah, that is the question.'

'Have you seen him? has any one told you about him?

will he live in Dr. Morgan's old house? is he married? has he a tribe of children?

- 'One question at a time, ladies. Who asked if he were married? Cathy, of course. No; I believe not; but I never asked him.'
- 'You have seen him then. Oh, Miss Faith, does he not deserve to be shaken, to keep us in this suspense? Perhaps, after all, he is only a red-headed little apothecary.'

'That I am sure he is not.'

'He is nice then?' stimulated to fresh efforts by the twinkle in her brother's eye. Garth was evidently bent on enjoying himself at their expense.

'That depends on what you call nice. He seemed tolerably pleasant, talked good English without a twang, and had no

disagreeable provincial accent.'

'Young or old?'

- 'About forty, I should say; couldn't answer for a year or two.'
- 'Over forty! Then he must be an old bachelor. How dreadfully uninteresting!'

'I will repeat that speech to Mr. Logan.'

Cathy moved aside as if she had been stung.

Miss Faith hazarded the next question rather timidly: 'Was he tall or short?'

'Neither the one nor the other.'

Still further questioning elicited no remarkable items of information. He was not very stout, neither was he particularly thin; had a pleasant voice and manner; was somewhat sallow in complexion; and was becoming decidedly grey; did not wear spectacles, and had shrewd and rather humorous eyes.

'Where was he going to live?'

'Did not ask him; is at present putting up at the Deerhound. Comes from Carlisle, so he says.'

'From Carlisle? in a faint voice from Miss Faith.

'Yes. His name is Stewart, Angus Stewart, or rather Dr. Stewart, as he is now. On the whole he is a gentlemanly sort of fellow, and likely to prove an acquisition to our little circle. I say, Cath, won't Mrs. Morris set her cap at him?'

'I think we had better walk on now,' returned Cathy

abruptly, at the mention of the name. She had started violently, and had shot a quick, sidelong glance at Miss Faith. 'Come, Miss Faith, we shall be late for tea.'

'Yes; we shall be late,' she returned mechanically, putting a shaking hand on the girl's arm, as though to steady herself. There was not a tinge of colour in Miss Faith's fair face; her breath came and went unevenly; she spoke in little gasps. 'Are you sure that we heard right, Cathy? did your brother say his name was Stewart?'

'Yes; Angus Stewart,' returned Cathy, in a brisk, offhand voice; 'he comes from Carlisle. Ah, by the bye, I should not be surprised if he should prove an old hospital acquaintance of yours, Miss Faith. What fun that will be!

After all, the world is not so large as one thinks it.'

'It is very strange,' rejoined Miss Faith, and her lips trembled nervously over her words. 'The coincidence of the name and the place startled me a little. I knew some one of that name in Carlisle—let me see—ten years ago.'

'How very odd!' returned her companion, with well-counterfeited surprise, and looking straight before her. 'Only ten years ago? Ah, then it must be the same; besides, the

name is so very uncommon.'

'Angus? ah, that is what he used to say. He was very proud of his name. He told me once that was all of which he had to be proud. He was so poor, he meant. He was the house surgeon, and one used to see a good deal of him. He had a mother and sister, I remember, who lived in such a tiny house in the town.'

'And you have never seen him since?'

'No,' hesitating and faltering; 'I had to give up nursing, and come back to Cara. One loses friends sometimes in that way. It was hard, of course; for I loved my work and my children; but one must do hard things sometimes in this world,' finished poor Miss Faith, with unconscious philosophy.

# CHAPTER XXVI

#### THE NEW DOCTOR

'I learn'd at last submission to my lot, But, though I less deplored thee, ne'er forgot.'—COWPER.

'I WONDER how women of thirty-five feel under these circumstances,' thought Cathy, as she followed the others up the narrow dark staircase leading to Miss Cosie's neat sanctum. 'I should have imagined all sentiment would have been worried out of them by this time, in this dismal old millpond they call life. It is very odd, but it is amusing too,' she continued, with a certain girlish curiosity at the romance that was impending before her eyes. After all it was not without its pathos. 'Perhaps he will not recognise her when they meet, or most likely he has a wife and two or three children somewhere; I would not answer for him. It is the women who are faithful in these cases. In my opinion Jacob is the exception, not the rule. Poor old Jacob, how threadbare they have worn him! He was very patient and deep, but I liked Esau best.'

Cathy mused on in her rambling fashion. Now and then she and Queenie exchanged glances full of meaning.

'Is it—can it really be he?' whispered Queenie, as she tied and untied Cathy's velvet.

'Not a doubt of it,' replied the other. 'Hush! we shall hear more by and by.'

Miss Faith looked at them both with soft dazed eyes. She had no idea that they were talking of her. 'Angus Stewart! there cannot be two of that name,' she said to herself, as she smoothed out her ruffles with trembling hands, and tried to adjust her pearl brooch to her liking. 'I wonder when I shall see him, and if he will know me again.' But here Miss Cosie rushed upon them with a small whirlwind of interjections and exclamations.

'Oh, my dears; there, there, you all look as fresh as rosebuds. What do you think? The most wonderful thing has happened. Just fancy Christopher taking it into his head to bring him here!'

'To bring whom, dear Miss Cosie?' asked Cathy quickly,

for Miss Faith's colour was varying dangerously.

'Why, Mr. MacIvor, or what's his name—something Scotch I am sure. The new doctor, I mean. And there they are talking as comfortably as though they had known each other for years, instead of minutes. Christopher has taken him over to the church already.'

'If Mr. Stewart be here we had better go down,' observed

Cathy demurely, but her eyes danced with fun.

'Ah, Stewart, of course. There, there, my dear, my head is like a sieve, as Kit always tells me. "Why, Charlotte, there must be a hole in your brain somewhere," as he often says. And there he is, dear fellow, looking as pleased as though he had got some one to his liking; and indeed he seems a pleasant, sociable sort of person.'

'Yes; but your tea will be spoiled if we stand talking any longer,' put in artful Cathy; and Miss Cosie took the hint, and trotted off in her velvet high-heeled slippers, looking like a little grey mouse of a woman, in her dove-coloured

gown and soft Shetland shawl.

'There, there, my dear, if I had not forgotten all about the tea!' they could hear her exclaim, as she whisked down

the passage.

'Now we will go down,' exclaimed Cathy promptly. 'Come, Miss Faith, you are just as nice as possible;' for the nervous fingers were still adjusting the troublesome ruffle. 'Think what a loss you have over those last chapters of Trench's Parables, and how Cara will miss you,' continued the mischievous girl, as she hurried on her trembling companion. 'You have exchanged "the feast of reason and the flow of soul" just for Miss Cosie's junket and fruit.'

'I wish—I almost wish I were back with Cara,' gasped poor Miss Faith at the parlour door; and indeed the ordeal was a trying one even to a woman of thirty-five.

Mr. Logan made the necessary introductions as easily as possible. 'Here, ladies, is our new doctor, Mr. Stewart; give him a hearty welcome to Hepshaw. This is our girls' school-mistress, Miss Marriott, and this is Miss Catherine Clayton, but Miss Faith Palmer ought to have come first.'

'Miss Faith Palmer?' queried a pleasant voice, for the parlour was somewhat dim; 'here at least I ought to require no introduction,' and the newcomer pressed forward to catch

a further glimpse of Miss Faith's pale face.

'Yes, we are old friends, Mr. Stewart,' she returned, putting a very cold hand in his. She was glad of the half-light; he could not see her, she thought. How his voice thrilled her! Was it really ten years ago since she had last heard it?

'You are the last person I expected to see to-night,' he continued, still standing near her. 'It was very forgetful of me. 'I remember now that you said you lived at Hepshaw, but all sorts of things have driven it clean out of my head.'

'All sorts of things! He is married then,' argued Cathy

shrewdly. 'Oh, you men, you men!'

'Ten years is a long time, a very long time,' faltered Miss Faith. She experienced a chill feeling at the same moment. Was it a presentiment?

'Is it ten years since we met? I had no idea it was so long,' he returned, pulling his whiskers reflectively. 'Do you recollect the hospital and the boys' ward. What a capital nurse you used to be, Miss Faith, and how attached your little patients were to you!'

'Is it—is everything just the same?' she asked nervously.

'As when I was house surgeon there, do you mean? I don't know; I have been away from Carlisle a good many years. The hospital work got humdrum somehow, and I had a berth offered me as army surgeon in Bombay; and as Alice was married, and my mother was dead, I thought I might as well try my luck. I got tired of it though.'

'Alice married!' with a quick flush of interest. They were sitting at Miss Cosie's tea-table now. Mr. Stewart was

by his hostess, but he had found room for his old acquaintance beside him.

'You can't think how pleasant it is to meet an old friend in a strange place,' he had observed confidentially to Miss Cosie, and the little woman had nodded and smiled de-

lightedly.

'Yes, Alice is married; pretty girls will sometimes,' with the humorous sparkle in his eyes that she remembered so well. 'She married a clergyman in Lincolnshire, and has two fine boys of whom she is very proud; I have just been staying with them in their pleasant vicarage. By the bye, she asked after you.'

'After me?' with another rush of sensitive colour that

made her look years younger.

'Yes; she asked if I had seen you, but I could not satisfy her on that point. Don't you think it was a shabby trick, Miss Faith, vanishing from Carlisle as you did, and never coming back? I always meant to ask you that question if we ever met again.'

'I hoped to come back; I never meant to leave like that,' she returned in such a low voice that Dr. Stewart had some trouble to hear her. 'It was my sister's accident. You remember that I told you so when I wished your mother and Alice good-bye.'

'Yes; but I trusted that it was only a temporary affair,

and that you might soon have been set free.'

'I am not free yet,' in a sad voice that went far to explain to Dr. Stewart the meaning of the worn, patient face and set lines.

The Faith Palmer of ten years ago had been a fair, pretty girl, with the lightest step and the happiest laugh imaginable, and all manner of bright winning ways. It was a sweet face still, he thought, only so thin and careworn, and all the soft colouring faded. Even her voice was subdued and quieted past recognition; the despondence of the key had touched him painfully from the first.

Faith's scrutiny had not been half so severe. Dr. Stewart was older, of course, and browner; well, and stouter, and he was becoming very grey; but what did that matter? There were the pleasant outlines, that had lingered for ten years in

her memory, the shrewd, twinkling eyes, with their touch of humour, and the clear, genial voice.

'What does that mean? we are none of us free, for the matter of that,' he asked abruptly, but not unkindly. 'Here I am tying myself down for life in this northern village, because an Indian sun chose to play the most confounded tricks with my liver, and to make my existence a burthen to me. Do you mean that your sister is still an invalid?'

'Yes; I have been nursing her for ten years. There are the others, but she has got used to me. Poor Cara, she is to lie down all her life, they say.'

'Humph! that accounts for it,' with a dissatisfied glance, and pulling his whiskers rather fiercely. 'Well, Miss Faith,

I can't say home-nursing has agreed with you.'

'That means that you find me changed,' thought poor Miss Faith, trying to swallow down a very large lump in her throat. She had sustained her share in the conversation with tolerable success up to the present moment, but now the chilliness was creeping over her again. Why had he not tried to find out what had become of her? Hepshaw and Carlisle were not so very far apart after all. True, she had promised him to return, and had left him in perfect confidence that she would redeem her promise; but she had not been to blame for her failure. 'I gave it all up, all that I knew was waiting for me, because Cara wanted me,' she thought; 'but he never tried to find out what had become of me.'

It was well for Faith Palmer that Cathy, who was watching them from the other side of the table, struck in boldly at this juncture; it gave her time to swallow down the trouble-some lump, and regain her lost self-command. During the animated talk that followed, and in which Dr. Stewart bore a chief part, she sat plaiting the snowy table-cloth with her slender fingers, and saying over and over to herself, 'Ten years, and he never cared to know whether I was alive or dead.'

When tea was over she moved away from him, and took refuge beside Miss Cosie and her knitting. He would amuse himself with the younger ones of course. She had noticed already that Cathy had seemed to interest him with her frank liveliness, and then there were Langley and Queenie. Queenie

was looking so pretty this evening, with those deep-coloured roses in her dark dress. If only she could sit quiet in her corner, and watch him unobserved! It was hard work finding appropriate answers to Miss Cosie's somewhat rambling remarks.

'Of course he will take a fancy to one of them,' she thought, taking advantage of a pause during which Miss Cosie counted her stitches, and quite ignoring the fact that there might possibly be a Mrs. Stewart somewhere. 'I wonder which it will be. Queenie Marriott is far prettier to my taste, her eyes are lovely; but then Cathy is very taking. Men of forty generally fall in love with young girls; and then he is such a young-looking man, and does not look his age,' and Faith sighed as she thought of her faded youth.

'Did you speak, my dear?' asked Miss Cosie, at this point. 'Knit one, purl two, and knit two together. There, there, I am a stupid companion. Why don't you go and join that merry party opposite? Look at Kit; how delighted he

seems with the doctor.'

'Miss Cosie,' stammered Faith, 'did he—did Dr. Stewart say anything about his being married? He did not mention his wife, I mean. Cathy was wondering, and, and——'

'Married! why, to be sure, how stupid of us! I never thought of such a thing for a moment. Of course he must be; and not one of us has asked after her,' and the little woman patted her big curls in a flurried manner. 'Kit, Kit, my dear,' in a loud whisper, 'do tell Dr. Stewart that I want to speak to him.'

'Oh, Miss Cosie, pray don't. How can you think of doing such a thing?' exclaimed Faith, in a perfect agony at this unexpected proceeding. 'He is such a stranger. What will he think of us?' But her protestations were in vain, for Dr. Stewart had left his place with alacrity, and had come up to them with the brightest possible face.

'Did you send for me, Miss Logan?'

'Dear, dear, to think of that, when I have not been called Miss Logan for the last twenty years. Why even the Bishop says Miss Cosie; but then, as Faith says, you are a stranger among us, and don't know our manners.'

'Did Miss Faith say that ! Well, I shall hope not to be

a stranger long. I will promise not to offend again, Miss Cosie.'

'There, there, my dear, if he has not got it as pat as possible, as though he had known me all my life. Why even the school-children, bless their little hearts, call me Miss Cosie; I don't know myself under any other name. But talking of names, Dr. Stewart, and you have a nice funny, outlandish one of your own, here we have been together for two whole hours and not one of us has asked after Mrs. Stewart.'

'My mother is dead, Miss Cosie,' he replied very gravely, while Faith flushed and grew white, and wished herself home again with Cara. It was too dreadful of Miss Cosie. What would he think of them?

'Poor thing! well, well, she is better off,' returned his sympathising questioner; 'she is where the weary are at rest, you know, one must think of that. But I was not speaking of your poor dear mother, Dr. Stewart, but of your wife.'

For a moment Dr. Stewart locked at her in some perplexity, and then he got red, and glanced at Faith; but Faith had taken possession of Miss Cosie's knitting, and was doing her best to reduce it to hopeless and intricate confusion, and then a decidedly amused expression crossed his face.

'What makes you saddle me with a wife, Miss Cosie ?'

'There, there, you must not take it amiss of us,' returned the little woman earnestly, laying her hand on his arm. 'Of course we shall be glad to know her; and if there is anything that I can do to make her more comfortable when the poor thing comes amongst us a stranger, I will do it with all my heart.'

'But, my dear Miss Cosie,' with a smile, 'I have no wife.'

'No wife!' and Miss Cosie's eyes grew round, and she threw up her plump little hands in astonishment; 'no wife! do you mean she is dead too, Dr. Stewart?'

'I mean that I never had one,' laughing now outright.
'Don't you know poor men have no right to such luxuries?
When one has a mother and a sister to maintain, one must put away those sort of thoughts, however much one is tempted,' and Dr. Stewart spoke now in a curiously constrained voice.

'Miss Cosie, I must go home now, Cara will be looking for me,' exclaimed Faith, rising hurriedly. She felt as though

it would be impossible to sit there any longer listening to

Miss Cosie's gentle prosing.

'May I take the right of an old friend, and come and see you and your sisters to-morrow?' asked Dr. Stewart, as he held her hand. 'May I come and talk to this Cara, of whom I have heard so much?'

'Yes; we shall be very glad,' she replied, almost inaudibly,

and then he let her go.

He left Miss Cosie after that, and went back to the little group gathered round the window; but a change had come over them; they seemed talking seriously.

'Miss Catherine, are you in earnest?' Mr. Logan was saying, in an incredulous voice. He pushed his spectacles up to his forehead as he spoke, and the keen, near-sighted eyes seemed to probe the girl's soul as he spoke.

Cathy winced, but she maintained her ground unflinchingly. 'Ask Garth and Langley what they think on that subject.'

'She is leading us a sad life about it,' returned Garth, tilting his chair that he might have a better view of Queenie. Somehow the combination of the dark dress and roses took his fancy. Miss Marriott was certainly very pretty to-night; even Dr. Stewart seemed to find a certain witchery in the dark eyes, at least Garth thought so, which made him feel a trifle out of humour. He had been so long without a rival in Hepshaw, that the introduction of this sudden new element of manhood was likely to disturb his equanimity. 'Langley says there are no valid objections, so I suppose we shall have to let her go.'

'Let us ask Dr. Stewart what he thinks of it,' put in Langley, and, to her sister's relief, she quietly turned to him, and gave a brief sketch of Cathy's plan, to which he listened with ready interest, asking a question here and there in a skilful professional manner. When he was in possession of all the facts, he turned to Cathy.

'I don't see why it should not answer; at least you might give it a trial. I like your idea of every woman being trained to a definite employment; I never could understand the enforced helplessness of the sex. I have known pitiable examples of women being left dependent on overtaxed brothers, or turned upon the world absolutely without resources.'

'Your rule holds good with generalities, but in Miss Catherine's case—' began Mr. Logan, but Cathy somewhat

proudly interrupted him.

'If it be Miss Catherine's wish to be independent, and hold her own against the world, no one has a right to interfere. No,' speaking with sparkling eyes, and a certain storminess of manner, 'I am not one of those women who could bear to be cramped and swathed with the swaddling-clothes of conventionality; I claim my right to work for work's sake, and to be as free as any other of God's creatures.'

'You are quite right, Miss Clayton; I admire your senti-

ments,' observed Dr. Stewart.

'Hear, hear,' from Garth, somewhat sarcastically. He did not wholly approve of his wilful little sister's plan. 'Bless me, child, you are hardly more than eighteen; you seem in a vast hurry to make yourself independent of your brother; no one wants to get rid of you, you little monkey.'

Cathy melted a little at that. She gave him an affec-

tionate glance.

'All the same, you will be wanting to get rid of me one of these days,' she returned meaningly, and Garth reddened. 'Besides, I don't mean to leave home for good and all; I want to go up to London and learn nursing in all its branches, and then I shall know if I am fit for it. A fair trial is all I ask; and if Garth consents, no one has a right to raise an objection,' in an injured, appealing voice.

'You have chosen a noble profession—' began Dr. Stewart

warmly, but Mr. Logan quietly interrupted him.

'Granted, my dear sir, provided the motives are equally noble.'

'Now, Cath, you are going to catch it from your mentor,' observed her brother in an amused tone. 'Mr. Logan has

discovered a flaw in your grand scheme.'

'I suppose one can discover flaws in everything,' returned the Vicar in a musing tone. 'Youth is the time for great projects; sometimes they are another name for restlessness and discontent. Youth lights a candle,—a farthing dip light sometimes,—and sets out through the world to look for duties, and leaves the hearthstone cold, and old hearts growing chill round it. I have an old-fashioned notion that

woman's mission, in its perfectness, very rarely lies beyond the threshold of home.'

'How about Florence Nightingale?' interrupted Cathy.

'Or Sarah Judson?' from Langley.

'Or Mrs. Fry? or Joan of Arc?' commented Dr. Stewart.

'Or we might add Grace Darling, and a score of others,'

put in Garth.

'All typical women, raised up in their generation to perform a certain work, and performing it right nobly. The world calls them heroines, and with reason. They are heroines in the true sense of the word, for they have discovered the needs of the world, and, recognising their own power to remedy them, have fearlessly dared to cross the threshold of home duty for the larger arena, where only the strong prevail and the weak go to the wall.'

'Cathy does not pretend to be a Florence Nightingale,'

put in Langley quietly.

'I thought you always told us to elevate our standard?'

a little defiantly, from Cathy.

'The higher the better,' with a benign glance at her; 'but it must be a true standard, unselfishness and self-sacrifice for its base, and built up of pure motives. If it be one-sided it will topple over.'

'Ah! I can't read parables,' rather crossly.

'Are you sure that you are really trying to read mine? You remind me of some little child, Miss Catherine, gathering shells by the seashore, and throwing all the pearls away. If you look far enough into the meanings of things you will perceive their value. About your plan, now?'

'I will not hear a word against it,' she returned wilfully, and going over to Miss Cosie. 'It is bad enough to have to argue with all one's home people; but to be lectured in public,

and before Dr. Stewart—no, indeed, Mr. Logan.'

'Very well, I will reserve what I have to say in private,' he returned, looking after her with a sort of indulgent tenderness, as though she were the little child to whom he had compared her; and Queenie, who was near him, saw a certain vivid brightness in his eyes as he watched her.

The circle broke up after this; but, though it was tolerably late for Hepshaw hours, they did not yet talk of

separating. It was a lovely moonlight night, and, at Garth's invitation, Queenie strolled with him up and down the Vicar's steep, narrow garden. Dr. Stewart joined them, and talked for some time about his Indian experiences.

They were both novel and interesting, and engrossed them wholly. Queenie was so fascinated by his description of Indian scenery that she with difficulty remembered the lateness of the hour, and that Langley and Cathy would be wondering at her absence; but she at last made an excuse to leave them.

She lingered for a moment under the shadow of the house to watch the two dark figures still pacing up and down the steep path. This evening's excitement had quickened her pulses. The arrival of the stranger, Miss Faith's repressed agitation at the sight of him, Cathy's strange restlessness and plan for leaving home, had disturbed the even current of events. moral air seemed charged with electricity and rife with disturbance; somewhere a storm seemed impending. This sense of movement, of vitality, was not unpleasant; youth dreads nothing more than monotony. It is only in age that one sits with folded hands expecting nothing. Garth's manner, too, had given her pleasure; it had been more than usually There had been appreciation in his glance, a certain cordiality in his tone, that had fallen pleasantly on her ear. 'If he will only remain my friend I shall envy no girl her lover,' thought Queenie, with a sudden fulness of heart: but at that moment she was startled from her reverie by the sound of voices in the dark entry behind her.

She could hear Mr. Logan's quiet tones, and yes, surely that voice answering him was Cathy's! Before she could free herself a sentence or two reached her ear.

'You will think over what I have said, my child? You will be good and give up this, to please me?'

'No, no,' returned the girl passionately, and the low, vehement tones gave Queenie a shock, for they were broken as though with weeping; 'you must let me go. I will not stay and make you wretched, as I know I should do.'

'You would make me very happy, Catherine.'

'No, indeed, Mr. Logan, you are too great, too high for me; I cannot reach to you. I should tire myself and you

# QUEENIE'S WHIM

with the second. Oh, you must let me go! I must be free!'

thou green wild bird, and take my blessing with you;

with the tones were too low to be distinguished;

with an through moved away a figure brushed past her, and
abdut down the garden path

to was theby.

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# CHAPTER XXVII

### NEXT DOOR TO THE EVERGREENS

'Even her little mirror
Bore witness to the change
For to love the face within it
Was something new and strange.
She had looked before and seen it
So thin and hard and grey;
Looked, that her hair and collar
Were smooth and in trim array.'—ISA CRAIG-KNOX.

'CARA, Dr. Stewart has come to see you.'

It was Faith who spoke. It was the afternoon after Miss Cosie's tea-party, and she had met her old acquaintance down the village and had brought him in at his solicitation to see her sisters. Matters were not quite satisfactory to-day. Faith had had a sleepless night after her excitement, and a racking headache had been the consequence. And Miss Charity had been in one of her trying moods. A fresh access of pain made her exacting and irritable. Faith's nervousness and pale looks met with scant sympathy. 'If you were not quite so fond of gadding about and leaving other people to do your work you would not be so tired,' was the severe comment; the truth being that poor Miss Charity was having a bad time of it, and had missed Faith's soft voice and gentle manipulations.

It did not improve matters when Miss Hope came to the rescue, and took the book out of her sister's unwilling hands. 'There, Faith, run along and put on your bonnet and get some air; I will read to Charity,' she said, in her brusque, kindly

way, and settled herself vigorously to her task; and Faith, who knew how Cara hated Hope's reading, hesitated and lingered, and then finally yielded to the temptation of the fresh air and sunshine.

It was a little trying that at this moment she should meet Dr. Stewart.

At thirty-five a sleepless night is no beautifier, one lacks youth's cosmetics then. Faith knew her heavy half-extinguished eyes had black rings round them. The face under the close little Quaker bonnet looked older and more worn than it had last night.

'How do you do, Miss Faith? we can see each other more clearly than we could last evening. Well, we have neither of us grown younger,' and Dr. Stewart scrutinised his pale com-

panion with the utmost composure.

Faith glanced at him rather timidly; his manner troubled her, it was more brusque, a little rougher than it used to be. The shy young doctor had seen the world since then. Dr. Stewart certainly looked a little different this afternoon. He was much older and stouter than she had thought him yesterday; his hair was iron-grey, and his face had a brown, weatherbeaten aspect, and the lines round the mouth were a trifle hard and sarcastic. She could see him more clearly than in Miss Cosie's dim room.

'You find me changed too, I daresay,' he continued abruptly, reading her thoughts more shrewdly than of old. 'You see I have knocked about the world for the last seven or eight years, and that makes a man old before his time.'

'I don't think you look particularly old, Dr. Stewart.'

'Well, forty is not exactly patriarchal,' somewhat sarcastically. 'On the whole, I think I am rather proud of my grey hairs, they make me more important. You ought to have kept younger, Miss Faith, leading this quiet pastoral life of yours; you have not had all the hard hits and thumps that fate has dealt me.'

'I think inaction is sometimes more trying,' she answered faintly, for this absence of sympathy fretted her; and just then they met Cathy walking down the road with free easy gait, and carrying a basket of poppies and wild flowers. She nodded to them hurriedly and passed on. Dr. Stewart looked after her.

'That is a fine girl with a fine character, I will be bound,' he said, 'but I think I admire Miss Marriott more; I like her soft brunette colouring, and then she has such splendid eyes. Is that fine fellow, young Clayton, rather smitten with her?'

'I think, I am almost sure, that he cares for some one else; at least, one never knows,' putting up her hand to her head.

'No, one never knows; there is a fate in these things, I believe. That elder Miss Clayton looks very worn, a story there I expect; most unmarried women have had their story,—one can read it in their faces,—and men too, for that matter. There is a skeleton in every one's cupboard they say. At forty we begin to wonder if life's worth having after all. Well, well, you have a headache, I see; this sunshine is making it worse. If you will allow me I will see you home and call on your sisters.'

'They are all at home; they will be very glad to see you,'

she stammered, but her heart sank within her.

It was one of Cara's bad days, she might not receive him graciously; and then what would Dr. Stewart think of their humble little household? She was absent and nervous all the rest of the way. No wonder he found her changed.

'Cara, Dr. Stewart has come to see you,' she said, in a deprecating voice, as though she were committing some

solecism.

Miss Hope put down her book with a start, and Miss Charity looked up sharply from her knitting. 'Whom did

you say, Faith?' in an inflexible voice.

'An old hospital friend of hers, one of ten years' standing,' observed Dr. Stewart, throwing himself into the breach with military promptness. In a moment he recognised the position; his shrewd, observant glance took in the little parlour and the occupants in a trice.

It was not a very attractive scene to a man of the world; the details were homely and uninteresting. The bay window with its geraniums and fuchsias; the sharp little bright-eyed woman with her high cheekbones and thin curls; Miss Hope, vigorous and loud-voiced; and Miss Prudence's

ungainly figure hovering in the background. Faith, with her pale face and grey dress, looked like a soft speck of shadow in the sunlight. Dr. Stewart's masculine breadth and freedom of movement seemed to fill up the little room.

'Dr. Stewart! have we ever heard of him, sister?' asked Miss Charity, a little sarcastically, and appealing to Miss Hope.

'If you have I daresay you have forgotten it; ten years is a long time for ladies' memories. I was house surgeon in the hospital at Carlisle, where your sister worked.'

'Humph!' responded Miss Charity drily.

Dr. Stewart's eyes twinkled at the sight of Faith's despondent face; he was quite master of the position. Charity's cool reception did not daunt him in the least. placed himself leisurely by the side of the little square couch, and eyed its occupant curiously; he turned over the books that were piled on the narrow table beside her, and read their titles one after another, and then he began to talk. Faith's downcast face brightened; after a time she Dr. Stewart did not address himself to became less nervous. her, he seemed to ignore her existence completely. to Charity, who let her knitting fall out of her hot, dry fingers as she listened; to Miss Hope, sitting there erect and openeyed; even to poor, grim Miss Prudence, to whom few people Faith raised her soft eyes every now and then in surprise; she had no idea Dr. Stewart was such a clever, well-read man; his brusqueness did not jar on her now. judge by his conversation he might have read half the books that were written. He swallowed up Miss Charity's little modicum of information in a moment, and left her high and dry, with all her long sentences unsaid. Miss Hope gasped and said, 'There, now, would you have believed it!' to the stock of choice anecdotes with which he regaled them. were four maiden ladies so well entertained on a summer's afternoon.

Even Miss Prudence, the most rigid of housekeepers, counted over her scanty store of preserves mentally, and decided to ask him to tea. Faith almost held her breath for the next moment; but Dr. Stewart accepted the invitation with alacrity. While the tea was brewing, and Miss Prudence hunted out a remnant of rich cake, he drew his

chair a little closer to Miss Charity, and questioned her somewhat minutely on the subject of her accident.

'You suffer, of course, a great deal? It is a complicated case, I fear.'

'Yes; I have had my share of pain,' she answered cheerfully. The sharp angles had relaxed now.

'And your prospect of ease is small?'

'Ah, well! it might be worse,' she returned resignedly; and somehow the restless bright eyes and thin ringlets were less repellent to him. 'I have bad times and good times, and have to lie here and make the best of it. We need to have broken wills, Dr. Stewart.'

'Cara is so very patient,' interposed Faith, leaning over her sister's couch.

Miss Charity gave her an odd little push.

'No; I am dreadfully cross, and give heaps of trouble. One's pain gets into one's temper. Faith's been a good girl to me all these years; I don't know what I should have done without her.'

'O, Cara! please don't speak so, whispered poor Faith with tears in her eyes.

It was Dr. Stewart who said 'Humph!' now. He glanced curiously at the two women before him. Faith was considered quite a girl still by her sisters.

'I have a temper myself; I believe every one has, though he or she will not always own to it,' he remarked coolly, as he placed himself by Miss Prudence, and helped himself liberally to seed-cake.

It was getting quite dark when he rose at last to take leave. Faith accompanied him to the door.

'Well, is your headache better? you are not quite so pale,' he asked, not unkindly, as they stood together.

'Yes; the walk and the tea has done it good,' she answered evasively. What if he should guess at her sleepless night?

'I hoped I should have come in for a compliment, and that my conversation might have helped to charm it away. You used not to be so matter-of-fact, Miss Faith.'

Such a rush of colour answered him. 'I wonder you recollect so long ago,' she returned somewhat unsteadily.

'I wonder at it myself. Perhaps you have helped to jog my memory. Well, well, we were young and foolish once. So this has been your life for the last ten years?'

'Yes; just this, and nothing else,' with a sigh.

'No wonder you are thin, and have forgotten how to smile. Ten years of this sort of thing! Well, you women beat us after all;' and then he turned on his heel and went down the little garden path bordered by Faith's roses.

In a very little while Dr. Stewart took up his position in Hepshaw, and buckled to his work in a stout, uncompromising manner that seemed natural to him. From his patients he reaped golden opinions, in spite of a deeply-rooted dislike of humbug, and a tendency to shrug his shoulders impatiently over feminine fads and fancies. He was soon a general favourite. He was prompt and kind-hearted; in cases of real suffering nothing could exceed his patience and watchfulness. People soon got over his little brusqueness, and said openly that Dr. Stewart was a real acquisition to the neighbourhood.

He had taken temporary lodgings in the village; but report was already busy with the fact that Juniper Lodge, Dr. Morgan's old house, next door to the Misses Palmer, had been visited more than once by the new surgeon. By and by suspicion became certainty, when painters and workmen arrived on the premises. Soon the forlorn exterior of Juniper Lodge began to wear a brighter look—the old green verandah was repainted, fresh papers and plenty of whitewash made the dark old rooms habitable, the evergreen shrubs were cut down or transplanted, the walks weeded and gravelled, a van-load of furniture made its appearance, and a tidy-looking woman with a pleasant Scotch face, answering to the name of Jean, took up her residence. The next day there was a brass plate up; and Dr. Stewart quietly walked into the Evergreens, and announced formally to the sisters that he was their next-door neighbour.

'And a very pleasant neighbour too,' observed Miss Hope to her gossips; 'so different to Dr. Morgan, with that slatternly housekeeper of his always down at heels and talking to the postman at the gate. That Jean must be a treasure; it is a treat to look at her caps and aprons. I

have been all over the house, and you could eat your dinner off the floor, as the saying is. Dr. Stewart drops in to see us very often; it brightens Charity to have a good chat with him. They have fine long arguments sometimes, only he always gets the best of it. He makes a rare commotion when he comes, for he always pulls up the blinds and throws up the windows, though I tell him not to expose our shabby old carpet. He had Charity and her couch out on the lawn the other evening; just fancy! and the poor thing has never been out for years. She was so pleased and excited that we all had a cry over it, and then he scolded us all round.'

It was quite true that the arrival of Dr. Stewart as their next-door neighbour made a great change in the little household at the Evergreens; the introduction of the masculine element diffused new life and activity. During his brief visits, for he seldom staved long, it was wonderful how much Dr. Stewart contrived to effect. The close little parlour where Faith had toiled over weary books or sewn long seams by Cara's couch for ten monotonous years was a different place now. The obnoxious geraniums no longer blocked up the window, there was plenty of air and light; Faith no longer gasped with pale cheeks in the close oppressive atmosphere. On fine afternoons Miss Charity's couch was wheeled out under the apple-trees; the poor lady could watch the butterflies glancing round her, or the great brown bees humming round her neighbour's hive. Instead of Trench's Parables, or D'Aubigné's Reformation, suspicious green volumes in certain standard editions lay beside her. Faith had no need to stifle hardly-to-be-repressed yawns over Kingsley's Hypatia, or Two Years Ago. Laura Doone and Black's Adventures of a Phaeton held them enchained for hours.

'I am afraid our tastes are demoralised, we are getting very lax and dissipated over our reading. It is very nice, but there is no method in it,' sighed Miss Charity.

'You have had solids for ten years, now your digestion needs a lighter form of nourishment; all work and no play dulls the brain as well as poor Jack,' returned Dr. Stewart decidedly. He had come in for one of his brief, businesslike visits; he was always dropping in somewhere, at the Vicarage, at Church-Stile House, at Elderberry Lodge, even at the

Sycamores, where comely Mrs. Morris with her seven olive branches lived. He did not favour Brierwood Cottage with his visits, but he constantly met Queenie going to and from her school, and walked beside her in animated conversation.

Faith met them sometimes as she went about her charitable errands among the cottages; she would turn a little pale and pass on somewhat hurriedly. Dr. Stewart never stopped her on these occasions; he would go on with his talk, casting shrewd kindly glances under the girl's shady straw hat. Poor Paith would look at them wistfully, with a shy, deprecating smile; she would have a certain sinking of heart for hours afterwards. 'He admires her, I knew he would,' she would say to herself a little sadly.

Poor Miss Faith: it may be doubted if this revival of an old intimacy were a source of unalloyed pleasure. True, the changeless monotony of her days was broken up; but the new interest and excitement had their drawbacks.

Time, after its usual kindly fashion, had to a certain extent healed her wound; the passionate yearning of ten years ago had merged into sad serenity. Faith treasured the remembrance of those few fleeting months, as women will treasure their one romance; those unfinished hopes and fears were buried tenderly in her breast. She had ceased to suffer, but she had not ceased to remember; the sacred impression had stamped her whole life.

And now, when the freshness of youth had passed, she had met her ideal again; but was the girl's ideal likely to be the woman's reality! did she fully recognise in Dr. Stewart the dark young surgeon of that Carlisle hospital, whose soft looks and words had won her heart!

Faith winced secretly at these questions, as she did at Dr. Stewart's brusque remarks. His experience, his knowledge of the world, his laxity and breadth of church views, daunted the simple woman; once or twice his roughness of argument hurt her.

'Ah, I am a poor creature!' she said to him once. 'I am not one of the clever ones, like you and Cara.'

'No; you are only so so, Miss Faith; your knowledge of the world is not in any way remarkable; you are not one

of the strong-minded women,' with a little dry chuckle, with which he would conclude his remarks.

But, though he hurt and disappointed her, there were times when a sudden softening of voice or look brought back the past with strange vividness. Now and then he let fall a word that showed that he too had not forgotten some chance allusion to old scenes, some memory of her tastes. 'Ah, you used to like this, Miss Faith,' or some such speech, that brought a flush of pleasure to her face.

Dr. Stewart looked very benign as he glanced at the homely group before him on the afternoon in question.

'This is better than twenty feet by eighteen of stuffiness,'

he said in his concise way.

The sisterhood were all gathered on the lawn. Charity's favourite—an enormous tabby—was purring underneath the old scarlet wrapper; Miss Hope's knitting-needles clicked busily; Miss Prudence was occupied over some silk patchwork, the little squares and diamonds shone in the sunlight; Faith was reading aloud Westward Ho. She put down the book with a bright, welcoming smile. The interest of the story had moved her, her eyes shone with soft, serious excitement; there was a scent of tall white lilies. Dr. Stewart's bees were humming noisily; a light wind stirred the long grass shadows; Miss Charity's curls were in disorder. Some fine white-heart cherries hung over Dr. Stewart's head; he commenced gathering some, 'by way of dessert,' he said coolly as he transferred them to his own pocket. 'Why did they not call you Cherry, Miss Charity, instead of that affected Cara?'

'It is only one of Faith's whims,' returned Miss Hope; 'neither Prue nor I ever use it; she begun it as a child and never left off.'

'Why should I not use it? it is far softer and prettier than Charity,' interposed Faith appealingly. Dr. Stewart gave one of his dry laughs.

'Every one has a right to their own fancies. I am prosaic enough to dislike pet names. Cara, when one is christened Charity!' with a contemptuous shrug; 'why, it is a direct snub to one's sponsors.'

Faith looked uncomfortable; she always did when Dr.

Stewart was in one of his quizzical moods. At such times he was given to find fault with everything. But in another moment he became serious.

'What an odd fancy that was of Chester's calling his little girl Nan. She is a pretty little creature, and her father seems to dote on her. I was over there yesterday; Mrs. Chester had one of her attacks.'

'Poor thing!' sighed Miss Charity, 'she is very delicate. People are fond of calling her fanciful, and no doubt she is full of whimsies like the rest of us; but it is hard work

having an ailing body and an ailing temper too.'

'Yes,' he assented; 'she has her share of trouble, but she has got the blessing of a good husband.' But here Miss Prudence shook her head grimly. She rarely joined in the conversation if a stranger were present; and, as her remarks were generally of a lugubrious nature, they were not greatly missed.

'An ill-assorted couple, doctor,' smoothing her black mittens with sad satisfaction. Miss Prudence was much given to expatiate in the domestic circle on the evils of matrimony, and to thank Heaven that she and her three sisters had not fallen into the hands of the Philistines; a peculiarly happy state of resignation for an unattractive woman, with a rigid and cast-iron exterior, and endowed besides with a masculine appendage of the upper lip.

'Humph!' grunted the doctor laconically; for he had an ill-concealed antagonism to Miss Prudence, and disliked gossip-

ing about his patients' affairs.

'If we were to add up all the ill-assorted marriages in the world, the sum would last us a long time,' observed Miss

Hope philosophically.

Right, my dear madam,' was the brisk answer; 'but "if folk won't sort themselves properly it is not other people's fault," as the old clerk said when—when the wrong couple got married.'

'They say marriages are made in heaven,' began Miss Charity, a little sentimentally; but Dr. Stewart interrupted

ner.

'They say so; but don't you think there is a good deal of human bungling and obstinacy at the bottom? One can't

fancy the angels, for example, taking a very great interest in a marriage de convenance, or a ceremony where title-deeds and money-bags play too prominent a part! I have seen something of human nature, Miss Charity, and have often found occasion for astonishment at the sad mess men, and women too, make of their lives.'

'I don't think women are often to blame,' observed Faith in a low voice.

'Humph! so that is your experience,' with an odd, inexplicable look as he rose from the grass. 'Well, ladies, this is vastly entertaining, and one could learn a good deal, no doubt; but there is work waiting for me in the shape of Jemmy Bates's broken leg, which, by the bye, Miss Faith, is progressing most favourably,' and, with a benevolent nod that included them all, Dr. Stewart walked off, still munching his cherries.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

#### LITTLE NAN

'Those whom God loves die young 'They see no evil days;
No falsehood taints their tongue,
No wickedness their ways.

'Baptized—and so made sure
To win their safe abode,
What can we pray for more!
They die, and are with God.'

ROBERT S. HAWKER.

A FEW days after Dr. Stewart's garden visit Emmie came running up the gravel walk at Brierwood Cottage with a frightened face. Queenie, who was sitting in the porch as usual, put down her work rather hurriedly.

'Oh, Queen, I do think something is the matter. Mr. Chester is coming up this way, and he has got Nan in his arms, and she looks so odd; I am sure she is ill or some-

thing.'

'Is he bringing her here, or to Church-Stile House?' asked her sister anxiously; but as she spoke Mr. Chester's tall figure came into sight. In another moment there was a click of the little gate, and he came rapidly up to them

carrying his child.

'May I come in, Miss Marriott? the sun is so hot I dare not go up the lane;' and, as Queenie nodded and made room for him to pass into their cool little sitting-room, he continued in an agitated voice, 'I do not know what ails Nan; she has been sleepy and quiet for a long time, and just now she trued very sick and poorly.'

He had placed himself in the low chair by the window as he spoke, and Queenie knelt down by him and examined the child. As she untied the large white sun-bonnet Nan shrank from her rather restlessly.

'Nan did want to go home, father; Nan very sick,' she

answered, hiding her face on his shoulder.

'That is what she keeps saying over and over again, he continued, still more anxiously. 'She was quite well when we left home this morning; she and her little maid were chasing each other along the lanes, pelting each other with poppies. I thought she was only tired and wanted to be carried; I can't understand this sickness and drowsiness all at once. Do you think, Miss Marriott, that it could possibly be a sunstroke?'

'I don't know; her eyes certainly look very odd,' re-

turned Queenie in great perplexity.

'O, father! Nan is so very tired,' moaned the little creature again, creeping closer to his broad breast. 'Ellen did say it was naughty to eat the pretty currants; but Nan is good now, only so sick.'

'Have you any pain, my darling ?' he asked, bending over

her.

'No; no pain, only Nan so tired,' she repeated in the most pathetic voice. Mr. Chester looked appealingly at Queenie.

'I am afraid she is very ill,' she returned reluctantly, for there was a strange look about the child that alarmed her. 'Emmie, dear, tell Patience to go and fetch Dr. Stewart at once, and you run across for Langley.'

'Aye, we must have Langley,' he repeated helplessly, looking down at his pet. Nan had left off her moaning and

seemed sinking into drowsiness.

'Will she let me undress her and lay her in Emmie's bed? she will be more comfortable than in your arms;' but, as Nan stirred uneasily and murmured 'Father; Nan cannot leave father,' Mr. Chester was obliged to carry her up himself. But even when he placed her on the cool pillow she still held his hand tightly.

'Father will not leave his pet; don't be afraid, my darling.'
When Langley arrived she found him still hanging over

the child. Nan seemed sleeping; her dark eyelashes swept her cheek; one small hand was folded in her father's.

'This sleep will do her good. It must have been the sun that made her feel sick,' he said, looking up at Langley with a relieved expression. Langley put back the long silky hair from the child's forehead, but did not answer. Some chill presentiment for which she could not account had seized her at the moment of Emmie's summons; and then, why did not Nan move when she kissed her?

'I do not think this looks quite like sleep, like natural sleep, I mean. I think we ought to try to rouse her, at least till Dr. Stewart comes. Speak to her, Harry; she has never slept so soundly before.'

'Nan, Nan, my little one, father wants you,' but for the first time in her infant life, Nan was deaf to her father's voice.

'What can we do? what are we to do? Dr. Stewart will not be home for another hour,' exclaimed Queenie, now really terrified. No suspicion of the truth had entered into any of their minds. Only when it was too late did the child's speech about the pretty currants recur to her.

The next two hours that passed were never effaced from Queenie's memory. No efforts of theirs could rouse the child from the deathlike stupor that oppressed her. Langley had tried two or three remedies, but they were unavailing, and the father's agony was pitiable to witness. The little town was fairly roused, and messengers on horseback were scouring the neighbourhood after Dr. Stewart. But he had gone to a farmhouse some five miles distant, and delay was inevitable. Garth and Ted had each gone in different directions, and Faith Palmer had driven over to Karldale to tell Mrs. Chester the reason of her husband's long absence.

It was just before Dr. Stewart's arrival that Langley, examining the child's clothes, found some dark crimson stains on the front of the little white frock. She showed them to the doctor, as he stood with a grave face looking down at the child. A very brief survey had satisfied him.

'Humph! it is just as I feared when young Clayton told me the symptoms. She has been eating deadly nightshade. Children sometimes mistake them for currants. Why was whe allowed to run about without her nurse?' 'She had the girl with her,' returned the poor father, and here he uttered a strong expletive; but Langley laid her hand on his arm and said 'Hush! What can you do to wake her, Dr. Stewart?'

'Nothing,' returned the doctor sadly. 'An hour or two sooner and I could have saved her. But, my good sir, these things are not in our hands. It is neither your fault nor mine that I was not here.'

'You can do nothing!' turning upon him almost fiercely in his despair, as though he would wrest the child's life from him by force.

'Nothing,' he repeated emphatically, for it was best that the miserable father should realise the truth at once, and not cling to the shadow of a hope. 'The child is sleeping herself to death; in a few hours it must all be over.'

'Try to bear it, Harry,' said Langley, in her low, soothing voice, for the strong man absolutely staggered under the blow. Her face was almost as white as his as she guided him to a chair, but he turned from her with a groan and hid his face in the child's pillow.

'I will come again; there is nothing for me to do here,' said Dr. Stewart. His voice was rough, probably with emotion, as he turned away abruptly.

'An hour or two earlier and I could have saved her,' he said to Queenie as she followed him downstairs. 'It goes hard with a man to know that, and that he can do absolutely nothing. Just because my mare wanted shoeing, and I went out of the beaten track, there is another life gone, that is what I call a mystery,' and Dr. Stewart muttered his accustomed 'Humph!' and went away with a sorrowful face, for he was soft-hearted, and loved all children for their own sweet sakes.

There was literally nothing to be done after this. Garth came in by and by and paid a short visit to the room upstairs, but he did not stay long.

'Langley is with him, and we have sent for his wife. There is nothing that a fellow can do, and—in short, I can't stand it,' he blurted out confidentially to Queenie, with a man's instinctive horror of scenes. 'If there were something that one could do: but in these sort of cases women are

the best. It cuts one to the heart to see him going on like that;' and Garth turned on his heel abruptly, and walked to the window.

But he made himself of use too in that troubled little household; for he succeeded in coaxing Emmie, who was sobbing with nervous excitement, to go with him to Church-Stile House, and promised Queenie to place her under Cathy's care for the night. This was a great relief to Queenie, who had reason to dread any of these sort of depressing scenes for her, and left her free for any duty that might devolve on her.

A sad sight awaited her upstairs. The setting sun was flooding the little chamber, and the last dazzling rays shone full on the face of the child. Mr. Chester was kneeling by the bed, with one little hand hidden in his; Langley, with a white, rigid face, was standing beside him. As the hoarse uncontrollable sobs, those tearless sobs of a strong man, smote on her ear she shivered and shrank back as though some blow were dealt her.

'O, Queenie, this is dreadful! Who can comfort him? Where is his wife and the mother of his child?' she whispered, as the girl went up to them. 'It is she who ought to be here, not I.'

'We have sent for her. Hush, Langley, he will hear you.'

'Ah, he hears nothing; he will have it that she will wake

and speak to him.' But her words reached his ear.

'She will, Langley; how can you be so cruel? always do just before—' 'the last,' he was going to say, but the words choked him. 'You will say good-bye to father, and give him one sweet kiss, will you not, my little Nan, my darling, my treasure?'

'O, Harry, try to bear it! Harry, Harry, won't you listen to me a moment?' and Langley laid her cold hand on his arm; but her touch only seemed to make him more

frantic.

'No, I will not bear it; I cannot bear it. Have I not suffered enough? Will God take from me my only comfort? O, my little child, my little child!' with another burst of anguish.

'See how calm and peaceful she looks,' she went on, in

her quiet, controlling voice, but her face was like marble; 'just sleeping peacefully into her rest; no pain, no suffering. It is so "He giveth His beloved sleep"; try and think of that, Harry.'

'She was my only one,' he muttered gloomily; she must not die—she must not. I tell you I cannot lose her. I will not give her up. She used to kneel up upon my knees and say her pretty prayers to me every night, the darling. "God bless Nan, and Nan's father," she always said that.'

'Yes; and He will bless you, my poor Harry.'

'Is it blessing me to rob me like this of my all? O, Langley, pray to Him; you are a good woman; pray both of

you that she may be spared to me.'

'Ah, if it were only His will!' sighed Langley. Did the memory of those strange pathetic words of another heart-broken father cross her memory? "While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live?" 'Ah, if it were only His will!'

'Hush! did you see her stir? I saw her, I felt her; she is waking now. Nan, my pet, my darling, open your sweet eyes and look at father.' But, alas, the little inanimate form

still lay in its deathly torpor.

And so the hours passed. Dr. Stewart came and went again; and Garth stole up the uncarpeted stairs, and stood outside with bated breath, to listen if a further change had taken place. But still Mr. Chester knelt beside the little white bed, and Langley and Queenie kept faithful watch beside him.

It was long past midnight when Queenie, laying her hand on the child's brow, felt it cold beneath her touch, and knew that the last feeble breath had been drawn, and signed to

Langley that all was over.

But even then the unhappy father would not realise the truth; and when at last it dawned upon him, he bade them with passionate impatience to leave him there with his dead. 'Leave me alone with my child; she belongs to me; she is mine;' and as they went out sadly they could hear him groan, 'O, my little Nan, my little, little child.'

As they left the room, Queenie could hear Garth calling to

her in a suppressed voice, and at once went down to him. He took hold of her hand, and led her into the cheery little parlour. There was a bright fire in the grate; a comfortable rocking-chair stood near it; the tea-tray was on the round black table where the sisters ate their simple meals.

'Sit down there and warm yourself,' he said kindly, 'and

I will give you a cup of tea. Where is Langley?'

'She went into my room; I think she wants to be alone; I will go up to her presently. O, Mr. Clayton,' bursting into tears, for this touch of thoughtfulness moved her from her enforced calmness, 'it has been so sad, so dreadful, all these hours.'

'Yes; I know it has been very hard upon you. Poor Chester, and poor dear little Nan; who would have dreamed of such a catastrophe? Even Dr. Stewart, who is inured to all sorts of painful scenes, seems quite upset by it. It must be hard for a man to lose his only child,' continued Garth gravely, as he brought the tea, and stirred the fire into a more cheerful blaze.

'I did not know you were here,' she said, after an interval of silence. The warmth had revived her, and the flow of nervous tears had done her good. How she wished that Langley could be induced to come down too!

'I could not make up my mind to leave you all in such a strait. Langley was here, and I thought after all that I might be of use. I am glad I thought of keeping up the fire. I had a grand hunt for Patience's tea-caddy; it took me no end of time to find it.'

Garth was talking in a fast, nervous way to keep up his own and Queenie's spirits. He had never seen her cry before, and it gave him an odd sort of pain. The thought of the room upstairs, and of the heartbroken father kneeling there by his dead child, weighed upon them both like lead; only Queenie stretched out her cold hands to the blaze, and drank her tea obediently, and felt cheered by Garth's kindness.

'These sort of things upset one's views of life,' he continued, after a pause. 'I suppose we all know trouble in some shape or other; but when it comes to a man losing his only bit of comfort, and Heaven only knows what that child was to the poor fellow—well, I can only say it does seem hard.'

'That is what I felt when I thought I was going to lose Emmie. Mr. Chester has his wife.'

'She has never been much good to him. I am no scandal-monger, but one can't help seeing that. I wonder what has become of her and Miss Faith?' he went on restlessly, walking to the window and looking out on the dark summer night.

Queenie left him soon after that. 'She must see after Langley,' she said; 'and there were other things that ought

to be done,' she added, with a shudder.

Garth let her go with some reluctance; the little parlour looked desolate without her. He sat down in the rockingchair after she had left, and fell into an odd, musing dream. 'How strangely they seemed to be drawn together,' he thought. He was as much at home with her as he was with Langley and Cathy; it had come quite naturally to him now to take her under his protection, and care for her as he did for them. It had been pleasant ministering to her comfort just now. How pretty she had looked sitting there in her black dress, with her head resting against the hard wood of the chair. Most women looked ugly when they cried, but her tears had flowed so quietly. And then he wondered how Dora looked when she cried, and if she would ever gaze up in his face as gently and gratefully as Queenie did just now. And then he fell to musing in a grave, old-fashioned way on the inequalities of matrimony, and the probable risk of disappointment. Things did not always turn out well, as poor Chester had found to his cost. In times of trouble a man must turn for comfort to his wife. Was Dora the one likely to yield him this comfort? She was very strong and reliable; all manner of good qualities were hers, besides her creamy skin and golden hair; but would she be gentle and soft with him at times when a man needed gentleness?

Garth was disquieting himself a little over these thoughts while Queenie stole up the little staircase. All was quiet in Emmie's room as she passed; her own was chill and dark as she entered it. Langley had not lighted the candle; she was sitting by the open window looking out at the black, starless night. The rain was falling now, the drops were pattering on the creeper. Queenie gave a little shiver of discomfort at

the dreary scene, and thought regretfully of the rocking-chair

'Have you been in again, Langley ?'

'Yes; but he will not let me stay or do anything for him; he wants her all to himself for a little, he says. He just let me put things a little comfortable, and as they should be, watching me jealously all the time, and then I came Garth must go in by and by, and coax him down.'

Langley spoke in a tone of forced composure, but her breath was laboured, and the hand that touched Queenie's

was so damp and cold that the girl absolutely started.

'Dear Langley, all this is making you quite ill. come down with me; your brother has lighted a fire, and it is so warm and cosy, and we can talk ever so much better

there.' But Langlev refused.

'No, no; I must stop here as long as he is shut up in that room. What do I want with warmth and comfort while he is suffering—suffering? and I can do nothing for him nothing, nothing!' in a voice of such despair that Queenie started. A new light seemed breaking on her.

'He asked for you directly, before his wife was sent for, I know. I think he likes you to be with him, Langley;

you are old friends, you know.'

'Yes; I know. He called me to him just now, and we stood together for a long time looking down at the child. His eyes asked me for comfort; but what consolation had I to give him? His wife ought to be there, not I; we both knew that; and then he sent me away.'

'But you need not have gone.'

'Could I have stood there taking her place when I know too well what we have been to each other? He was right to send me away, and I was right to go; but O, Queenie, this night is killing me!' and Langley leant against her so heavily, and her voice sounded so strangely in the darkness, that Queenie was frightened. If she guessed rightly, what utter misery there was locked up in this woman's breast!

'You must lie down on my bed; I will not talk to you like this,' she said firmly. And when Langley, faint and exhausted with emotion, offered no resistance, she fetched a thick shawl and folded it round her, and then lighted a candle and administered some sal-volatile. The dim light showed a very ghastly face, and great bright eyes brimful of wretchedness; the somewhat thin lips were trembling with weakness.

'Don't look at me, Queenie; don't let me talk. I am not myself to-night; I shall say things I ought not to say.' But Queenie only kissed her tenderly, and drew the white face down to her shoulder.

'Do talk, Langley; it will do you good. You have kept it all in too long, and it has done you harm. No one wants me, and I can sit beside you a little. When I hear the least movement in Emmie's room I will go in.'

'We ought not to leave him long alone,' she answered faintly. 'Garth must go in to him presently. He would mind me, I know; but I dare not let him see me like this. O, Queenie, whatever sorrow you may have to bear, may you never know mine—to bring trouble on the man you love, and then not to be able to comfort him!'

Queenie stroked her hair softly; there was sympathy conveyed in every touch. 'Tell me all about it, Langley,' she whispered; 'I always knew you had a grief. If you loved Mr. Chester, and he cared for you, why did you not marry him?'

'Why, indeed! I have had five years in which to ask myself that question. I loved him, of course. We had grown up together; as long as I could remember, Harry and I had been together caring for each other. Garth, every one, expected how it would be.'

'Perhaps they all took it too much as a matter of course.'

'How did you know that ?' lifting her head from Queenie's shoulder. 'No one can have told you. I never had any confidente.'

'One guesses things by instinct sometimes.'

'You are young to know human nature so well,' sinking back with a sigh. 'Ah, six years ago I was like Cathy—proud, impulsive, and loving my own will. I had a great notion of independence. I thought women were not allowed enough liberty, that they held themselves too cheaply; and though I loved Harry, I was not quite willing to marry him.'

'That sounds strange. I can hardly imagine you like Cathy'

'No; my self-will is broken now; I have expiated my girlish failings too bitterly. One's spirit dies under such an ordeal. But though I blame myself, not him, I think a stronger nature would have controlled me.'

'Did you refuse him then!'

'I suppose I did. He came to me one day; things had been going on for a long time, but there had been no actual wooing. Harry was a matter-of-fact man, and I was just the reverse. I had got my head full of novels, and had framed my own ideas of love-making. I wanted an ardent lover, one who would carry me away with the force of his own feelings. The quiet, businesslike manner in which Harry spoke fired my pride and resolved me; besides, as I said before, that though I loved him, I was not quite willing to be married.'

'Do you remember what he said to you!'

'Yes; his very words. I was in the drawing-room at Church-Stile House, and he came to me looking very quiet and pale. "Langley," he said, "this has been going on a long time, too long, Garth and I think, and I don't seem to be any nearer to what I wish. We care for each other, I know. Can you not make up your mind to be my wife! Karldale Grange is waiting for its mistress." Just that; not a word of his love for me, not a single protestation.'

'I think it was very honest and straightforward.'

'Can you guess how I answered him! I thanked him coldly, and said that I was in no mood for marrying, that I was not sure that I should ever marry; I cared too much for my freedom.'

"Have you been playing with me all these years, Langley?" he said sadly, and his face grew so white. "I can hardly believe that. I will not press or annoy you, dear;

I will speak to Garth;" and then he went away.

'Oh, if he had only stayed, Queenie, and reasoned with me a little, my better nature must have prevailed, for I loved him so; but his apparent coolness angered me, and then Garth came and scolded me, which made matters worse. He was for carrying things with a high hand; but I only grew obstinate. And so one wretched day Harry and I had bitter words together, and he faced round upon me when I

sat pretending to work, and swore that if I would not marry him, Gertrude Leslie should; and with that he turned on his heel and left me.

'I felt I had gone too far then, and that he meant what he said. Sooner than lose him altogether, I would have humiliated myself in the dust. I threw down my work, and called out Harry, but he did not hear, and in another moment his horse's hoofs sounded in the lane.

'I did all then that I could do. I wrote a penitent little note begging him to forgive me, and come back to me, and all should be as he wished; and I sent a messenger on to Karldale with it, charging him to deliver it into Harry's own hands; but, alas, it was brought back to me unopened. Harry had never been home at all, he had ridden straight off to Blanddale; and the next morning I heard Gertrude Leslie had promised to be his wife.

'O, Queenie,' as the girl leant over her and kissed the white lips that quivered still with the remembrance of that long-past agony, 'that moment was a sufficient punishment for all my mad folly; even Garth thought so, for he had no word of reproach for me.

'But I opened my lips to no one. None knew what I suffered during those nights and days. An old aunt of ours had fallen ill in Carlisle, and I went to her, and stayed with her till she died.

'When I came back they were married, and by and by Harry and I met. I could see he was greatly changed, and his manner was constrained and nervous; but it was not in his nature to bear malice, and I know he soon forgave me, all the more that he must have seen that he was not the only one to suffer.'

'Dear Langley,' stroking the worn face still more tenderly,
'I can hardly bear to hear it; it seems all so dreadful. I
cannot understand how women can live through such things,

'One gets used to torture,' with a strange smile. 'Have you not read that martyrs have been known to sleep on the rack? The worst part of life always seems to me that pain so seldom kills. We go on mutilated, shorn of our best blessings, wounded and bleeding, but we never die.'

Queenie stooped down and quoted softly in her ear,

'Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul; which long for death, but it cometh

not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures?'

'Ah, I have often repeated those words. I thought when I first saw Harry after he was married that it would kill me; to think that he belonged to another woman, that she, not I, had a right to his every thought and care. It seemed as though my heart could not hold all its pain.'

'Ah, but he had not ceased to love you. There must

have been some consolation in that thought.'

'Yes; but it was not a right consolation; and then I knew that I was the cause of his unhappiness—that was the hardest part of all. He was so good; he tried so hard to do his duty by her, and make her a fond and faithful husband; but she never loved him.'

'But she married him.'

'Alas, she married him out of pique. Her lover had jilted her, and in her despair she took the first offer that came to her. Poor Gertrude! she has told me all her troubles. I am her friend as well as Harry's, and all that can be done for them I have tried to do to my utmost.'

'That I am sure you have.'

'It used to be dreadful to go there, and see how she treated him; but it was my penance, and I bore it for his sake. When the child came things were better between them, and latterly I hoped that he had ceased to regret the past; but now,' she wrung her hands, and the despairing look came back into her eyes, 'God has taken from him his only comfort, and I must see his misery and do nothing.'

There was a moment's silence, only the ceaseless patter of the rain sounded on the leaves, and then Langley raised

herself with effort.

'He has been too long alone; some one must go to him,' she said anxiously. 'Either you or Garth must rouse him.'

'Hush!' interrupted Queenie; 'I think I hear something. There is surely the sound of wheels in the distance. It is coming nearer; yes, it is stopping at the gate.'

'Then it must be Gertrude,' exclaimed Langley, putting back the damp hair from her face, and trying to rise from the bed. 'Look out, dear Queenie. Oh, if it should be Gertrude!'

'I am straining my eyes in the darkness, but it is so hard to distinguish anything. Yes, there are two figures, one very tall. I think that must be Mrs. Chester. Garth is opening the door; now he will bring her up. Lie down again, Langley; you look dreadful.' But Langley only shook her head, and renewed her efforts to rise.

They could hear footsteps ascending the narrow stairs. The gleam of a candle preceded them. Langley tottered feebly to the head of the staircase; but Mrs. Chester did not see her.

'Where is she's where is my child s' she said, putting out her hands and feeling before her, with the gesture of a sleep-walker, or one stricken suddenly blind; and Queenie, moved with sudden compassion, sprang forward and guided her to the door.

'Little Nan is there,' she said. 'He is sitting by her; we cannot get him to leave her.'

Yes; he was sitting there in the same attitude in which they had left him, with the child's dead hand still clasped in his. At the sight of that bowed figure, that mute despair, the wife's heart woke into sudden life, and she walked feebly towards him.

'Harry,' she said, bursting into tears, and throwing her arms round his neck, 'my poor Harry, it is our little child; mine as well as yours. We must comfort each other.'

## CHAPTER XXIX

# 'I KNEW YOU WOULD BE SORRY FOR US'

'When they see her their tears will cease to flow,
Lest they should fall on this pure pale brow,
Or the lilies the child is holding.
With symbol flowers in stainless hand,
She goes by the great white throne to stand,
Where Jesus His lambs is folding.'
HELEN MARION BURNSIDE,

As the door closed upon the bereaved parents, Queenie heard a low 'Thank God!' behind her, and immediately afterwards Langley crept softly away. When Queenie went back to her, she found her lying on her bed shedding tears quietly. The strained and fixed expression of her face had relaxed; the worn nerves and brain had at last found relief.

'Let me cry; it will do me good,' she said, when the girl would have hushed her. 'If you only knew how long it is since I have been able to shed a tear. I felt as though I were turning into stone. But now—ah, if she will only be good to him I think I could bear anything.'

Queenie was obliged to modify her opinion of Mrs. Chester as she watched her during the trying hours that followed. Whatever sins Gertrude had committed against her husband and child during their brief married life she felt must be partially condoned by her present self-forget-fulness.

It may be doubted perhaps whether she had loved her child while it lived with a mother's strong passion. Certain words that little Nan had uttered in her baby language had given a contrary impression. 'Mammie did say, "Go away,

Nan,"' she had observed more than once. 'Mammie always so tired when Nan looks at her.' Might it not have been that, absorbed in her own selfish repinings and discontent, she had refused to gather up the sweetness of that infant life into hers until it was too late? That she was suffering now, no one could doubt who looked at her. The father's heart might be broken within him, but his was the agony of bereavement. No self-reproach festered his wound; no bitterness of remorse was his. But who could measure the anguish of that unhappy mother?

Queenie watched her half fascinated as she glided softly from place to place, a graceful, dark-eyed woman. The tall figure, once so full and commanding, was attenuated and bowed as though with weakness. Bright patches of colour burnt on the thin cheeks; soft streaks of grey showed in the thick coils of hair; and how low and suffering were the

once sharp, querulous tones.

It was a mournful little household in Brierwood Cottage. Mr. Chester had refused to leave the place where his child was. Little Nan still lay in Emmie's room. Queenie had given up hers, and had betaken herself to Patience's little chamber. Emmie was still at Church-Stile House.

Queenie used to go out to her work, and leave Gertrude alone with her husband. On her return she would see them sitting hand in hand talking softly of their child. Nothing but his wife's presence seemed to console the unhappy father. Only she or Langley could rouse him or induce him to take food. Once when they thought they were alone Queenie saw Gertrude take her husband's head between her hands and kiss it softly, and lay it on her breast. 'Harry, my poor Harry,' she whispered over him, with a perfect passion of pity. Did the warning voice within her admonish her that she too must soon leave him and join her child?

Langley came and went on brief ministering errands, but she never remained long. Now and then, when all was quiet in the little room above, she would go in and kneel down beside the baby coffin. What sort of prayers ascended from that lonely heart that had missed its way so early in life? 'Little Nan, I would have laid down my life to have saved yours,' she whispered, pressing her lips to the wood.

One day Captain Fawcett stood there with Emmie beside him. Emmie's great blue eyes dilated and widened with awe and wonder at the sight of the tiny white face. The little coffin, the bed, the room were perfectly strewn with flowers. Great boxes of rare hothouse flowers sent from Carliale, and directed in an unknown hand, had arrived that morning at the cottage. Gertrude was sitting weaving a cross in the room downstairs, while her husband watched her.

'Is that Nan? it looks like a stone angel lying under a quilt of roses and lilies. It is just like a little angel that I

used to see in the cathedral,' whispered Emmie.

'Aye, it is Nan; it is just as my girl looked when her mother dressed her up for the last time in her flowers,' returned Captain Fawcett tremulously. A tear rolled down his grizzled moustache; but Emmie's eyes only widened and grew solemn.

'It is a pity, such pretty flowers; and they will have so many there,' she continued reflectively. 'Aren't you glad that Alice has all those roses? Do you know, I often dream about your girl. She was like me, you know, only she had long hair. Last night I thought she and Nan came running to meet me; they were laughing so, and their hands were full of roses.'

'Bless your pretty fancies, my darling. Well, I dream of my little maid often myself, and she always comes to me and says, "Father." I can feel her little hand slipping into mine. And then when I wake I am lonesome somehow. Poor little Ailie.'

'You must not say poor,' returned Emmie, pressing heavily against his knee; 'she is not poor at all; she was very tired, you know, and now she is rested. Perhaps Nan would have been tired too if she had stayed longer.'

'Ah, so she might, poor lammie,' with a heavy sigh.

'The world is such a tiring place,' continued Emmie, moralising in her quaint childish way. 'Some one is always crying in it. If it were not for leaving Queenie alone, I think I should like to go too, and walk about the golden streets with Alice and Nan; there are such lots of children there, and it is all bright, and nobody cries and looks and and miserable.'

'The world is such a tiring place; some one is always crying in it.' Alas! yes, little Emmie. Out of His bright heaven God looks down on the upturned wet faces of myriads of His creatures. What seas of tears roll between the earth and His mercy! If the concentrated pain of humanity could be condensed into a single groan, the whole universe could not bear the terror of that sound, reverberating beyond the bound of the uttermost stars, silencing the very music of heaven.

Such a tiring place! True, most true, little Emmie. A place where mistakes are made and never rectified; a place where a joyous meeting is too often replaced by a sad goodbye; where hearts that cleave together are sundered; where the best loved is the soonest taken; where under the sunshine lie the shadows, and the shadows lengthen the farther we walk.

Such a tiring place! since we must work and weep, and live out the life that seems to us so imperfect; since sweet blossoms fail to bring fruit, and thorns lurk underneath the roses. Yet are the letters written up, graven and indelible, on every mutilated life: 'What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.'

So one bright summer's morning, loving hands lifted little Nan and laid her in her resting-place by the lime-tree walk, and the childless parents followed hand in hand.

The churchyard was crowded with sympathising faces. Queenie was there at the head of her scholars, and Langley stood near her, leaning heavily on her brother's arm. When the service was over the children stepped up two and two, and dropped their simple offerings of rustic wreaths and flowers into the open grave. One child had fashioned a rude cross of poppies and corn, and flung it red and gleaming at the mother's feet. Gertrude took it up and kissed it, and placed it tenderly with the rest. The child, a chubby-faced creature

scarcely more than an infant, looked up at her with great black eyes.

'Oo'little gell will like my f'owers,' she lisped, as Gertrude burst into tears.

Queenie felt very heavy-hearted when, the next day, the Chesters left her and went back to their lonely home. Gertrude kissed her, and tried to say a few words of thanks.

'You have been a good Samaritan to me and Harry, Miss Marriott,' she said, in a broken voice; 'you have taken us in, and tried to bind up our wounds with oil and wine, and yet you were almost a stranger to us.'

'I shall come again. I cannot keep away from there,' added Mr. Chester, with a yearning look towards the place where the mortal remains of his darling were laid. 'No, I

cannot thank you, Miss Marriott, I never can do so.'

'Oh, hush! go away, please. Would not any one have done it in my place?' cried the girl, with a little sob. She leant against the little gate, watching them until the phaeton was out of sight. Garth, who was coming down the lane, crossed over the road and joined her.

'So you have your little home to yourself again,' he said, looking down at her kindly. 'Ah, well, it has been a miserable week to you and to all of us. No one can help feeling

for poor Chester; and as for that wife of his---'

Well! interrupted Queenie, fixing her strange, fathomless eyes on the young man, as he left his sentence unfinished. Every now and then they startled people with their strange haunting beauty; they startled Garth now, for he became suddenly confused.

'All I meant was, that one can easily see that Mrs. Chester is not long for this world. Stewart says so plainly, and she must be conscious of it herself. One can tell that

there is trouble in store for that poor fellow.'

'Yes, and she has begun to love him too late,' replied Queenie. 'All these years lost, and only to understand each other at the last; there does seem such a mystery in things, Mr. Clayton.'

'Not at all; he has only married the wrong woman,' returned Garth coolly; 'hundreds of men do that, and have to rue their mistake. You are only a girl, you do not know

the world as we do,' continued the young man, a little loftily. 'There are all sorts of temptations and influences. One needs all one's wisdom and strength of mind to steer clear among all the shoals and quicksands one finds in life.'

'It was Mr. Chester's own fault marrying the wrong

woman,' persisted Queenie, with a little heat.

Garth's loftiness and burst of eloquence did not move her in the least. His cool statement of facts was rank heresy in her eyes. What was it to her that hundreds of men had made matrimonial mistakes? In her woman's creed, that code of purity and innocence, it was a simple question of right and wrong. To love one woman and marry another, however expedient in a worldly point of view, was a sin for which there was no grace of forgiveness.

'Men make their own fate; it is for them to choose. No one need make mistakes with their eyes open,' continued the girl, with a little impatience and scorn of this matter-of-fact philosophy. 'If they make a poor thing of their own life it is not for them to complain.'

'Ah, you are hard on us. You are only a girl; you do not know,' returned the young man, looking down from the altitude of his superior wisdom into Queenie's wide-open indignant eyes with exasperating calmness. 'Your life compared to ours is like a mill-stream beside a rushing river: one is all movement; the strong currents draw hither and thither.'

'The mill-stream is often the deeper,' was the petulantanswer. Garth laughed; he was not at all discomposed by Queenie's impatient argument. He would have enjoyed having it out with her if he had had time, but, as he told himself, he had more important business in hand.

'By the bye, you are making me waste my precious moments as usual,' he observed good-humouredly; 'and I have never given you Langley's message. She and Cathy want you to come up to our place this evening; they think the cottage must be so dull now your guests have gone.'

'How kind and thoughtful of Langley!' returned Queenie; and now the brown eyes had a happy sparkle in them. There was no place so dear to her as Church-Stile House. If Garth could only have known it!

'You will be doing them a kindness by cheering them up a little, as both Ted and I will be away. Have you heard,' he continued gravely, 'that they are rather in trouble at Crossgill Vicarage. I had a letter this morning from Dora, I mean Miss Cunningham,' went on Garth, frowning a little over his mistake.

'Are you going there? I hope there is not much the matter,' asked Queenie, in a measured voice. There was no sparkle now in her eyes. The evening was to be spent without him; and then Miss Cunningham had written to him at the first hint of trouble. She had sought him, and not Langley.

'Oh, as to that, she does not say much in her letter. Miss Cunningham is not one to make a fuss about anything. It is Florence who is ill, and she and her father mean to go over to Brussels. Stay, I have her note here,' producing it from his breast-pocket. 'You can judge for yourself, there is not much in it; but then Miss Cunningham is one of the quiet sort.'

Queenie took the note a little reluctantly. Dora wrote a large, businesslike hand. Those firm, well-formed characters had nothing irresolute in them. It was curt and concise.

'Dear Mr. Clayton,' it began, 'my father wishes you to know that we have had bad news from Brussels. Darling Flo is very ill. Madame Shleïfer says it is typhoid fever; but as there are no unfavourable symptoms, there is nothing serious to be apprehended. One must make allowances for Beattie's nervousness; girls of seventeen are apt to exaggerate. Still papa and I cannot help feeling anxious, and we shall start by the early train to-morrow. If you could come over this evening we shall be glad, as papa wants to consult you about a little business. The porch-room shall be got ready for you, as I know you will make an effort to come to us in our trouble.'

'She does not say very much, but one can read between the lines. Florence is the youngest sister, and her favourite. I know she is terribly anxious,' observed Garth, as Queenie returned the note in silence. 'Well, I must be off; my trap will be round directly. You three girls will have a cosy evening without me I expect. Good-bye till to-morrow,' and Garth touched his felt hat and ran down the lane. 'He might have shaken hands,' thought Queenie, as she walked slowly back into the cottage.

The empty room felt very dull, but still it would have been better there than in Church-Stile House without him. On the whole, the evening was a failure. Cathy was in one of her quiet moods, and could not be roused into interest about anything. Langley looked paler than usual, and complained of headache, and Emmie was listless and restless. As for Queenie, she took herself to task severely for all manner of miserable fancies as she walked back to the cottage in the darkness.

'What is the use of your perpetually crying for the moon?' she said indignantly to herself. 'Are you going to spoil your life and other people's with such nonsense? It is not for you to say that he is marrying the wrong woman. She is a hundred times superior to you, and I suppose he thinks so. Why is he to be blamed because he sees no beauty in your little brown face? You are nothing to him but Miss Marriott, the village schoolmistress.'

. But that would not do, so she began again, looking at herself in the glass and crying softly. 'Yes, you are a poor thing, and I pity you, but I am disappointed in you as well. You are not a bit better or more to be trusted than other girls. You know you are jealous of this Dora Cunningham: that you hate the very sound of her name, as though she had not a better right to him than you. Has she not known him all her life? and could she know him without loving him? Why,' with a little sob, that sounded very pathetic in the silence, 'as though any one could help it. Even Emmie loves him, and follows him about like a dog everywhere. I am not a bit ashamed of my affection for him. I would rather live lonely, as I shall live, and care about him in the way I do, receiving little daily kindnesses at his hand, than marry any other man. It is not much of a life perhaps,' went on the girl, with a broken breath or two; it does not hold as much as other people's; but such as it is, I would rather live it than go away elsewhere, and forget, and perhaps be forgotten.'

Queenie was preaching a desolate little sermon to herself, but it edified and comforted her. It was only the eddying

of the mill-stream when a stone had been flung into it, she told herself by and by. She would be reasonable, and cease to rebel against an inevitable fate.

Garth's evening promised to be more successful. He had driven himself up to the Vicarage in the red sunset light that he loved, and Dora had come out into the porch to welcome him with her sweetest smile.

'How good of you to come! papa and I both wanted you so,' putting up a white little hand to stroke the mare's glossy coat. 'Poor old Bess, how hot she looks, and how fast you must have driven her; you are quite twenty minutes before the time we expected you.'

'Have you been looking out for me? I am glad I was wanted,' returned Garth, leaning down to take possession of the little hand. 'I suppose Bess and I were both in a hurry to be here,' he continued, as he looked down with kindly scrutiny at the dainty figure beside him.

Dora was a little paler than usual, and the blue eyes were a trifle heavy, but somehow her appearance had never pleased him better. She had dressed herself with even greater care than was customary with her. The soft cream-coloured dress, with its graceful folds, rested the eye with a sense of fitness. One tiny rosebud gave a mere hint of colour.

'I am glad you wanted me,' he went on, with a little stress on the personal pronoun. 'I must have been engaged' indeed to have remained away at such a time.'

'Yes, indeed. Poor papa, and poor dear Flo!' returned Dora earnestly, leading him into the hall. 'How could we help being very anxious and unhappy, and after Bee's miserable letter too? But that is the worst of girls; they cannot help exaggerating things.'

'I was afraid from what you said that poor Florence

was very ill.'

'She is ill, of course; one is always afraid of typhoid fever for a growing girl; and then papa has such a horror of German doctors. I must confess myself that I have every faith in Madame Shleïfer—such a judicious, temperate letter, and so different to poor Bee's, who is crying herself to sleep every night, and making herself ill.'

'But Madame Shlerfer does not love Florence as Beatrix does; she is liable to take alarm less easily,' returned Garth, moved at this picture of the warm-hearted, impetuous girl he remembered so well.

'Beatrix's affection is not greater than ours,' replied Dora calmly. 'Florence is the youngest, and I have brought her up from such a child. It is inconsiderate and a pity to write like that, and has upset papa dreadfully; but, as I told him, it was only Beatrix's way. I am afraid you will not find us very cheerful company to-night,' looking up with a certain bright dewiness in her eyes—not exactly tears, but a suspicion of them.

Dora never cried, as he knew he had once heard her say that it never mended matters, and only spoiled the complexion; but as she looked up at him now with a certain unbending of the lip, and a shining mist in her blue eyes, he felt himself touched and softened.

'I cannot bear to see you in such trouble,' he said, with involuntary tenderness in his tone.

'I knew you would be sorry for us,' she returned simply, not moving away from him, but taking the sympathy as though it belonged to her of right. 'It was so good of you to come all this distance just for papa and me.'

#### CHAPTER XXX

'IT MUST BE YES OR NO WITH ME'

'Silent she had been, but she raised her face;
"And will you end," said she, "this half-told tale?"

JEAN INGELOW.

GARTH felt a little excited as he went up to the porch-room to dress for dinner; to put on his war-paint as he told himself with a little grimace. Garth was a handsome man, and he never looked better than when he was in evening dress. Though he had less personal vanity than most men, he was in some measure conscious of his advantages, and on this occasion he was a little fastidious as to the set of his collar and the manipulation of his tie.

The porch-room had always been allotted to him on the rare occasions when he slept at the Vicarage. The best bedroom was always apportioned to more formal guests, but Garth much preferred his old quarters. The little room with its pink and white draperies fragrant with lavender, and its lozenge-paned lattice swinging open on the roses and clematis, and other sweet-smelling creepers, always reminded him of Dora. There was a portrait of her in crayons hanging over the mantel-shelf, taken when she was many years younger, with golden hair floating round her like a halo, the round white arms half hidden under a fleecy scarf—a charming sketch half idealised, and yet true to the real Dora. Garth leant his arms against the high wooden mantelpiece and contemplated the drawing for some minutes.

'She is prettier than ever to-night,' he soliloquised. 'No

one would think she was seven and twenty to look at her this evening. She is just the woman never to look her age; she is so thoroughly healthy in her tone of mind; she has none of the morbid fancies and overstrained nerves that make other women so haggard and worn. Look at Langley, for example, getting grey at thirty-two. Poor dear Langley! that was a bad business of hers and Chester's.

'And then Dora always dresses so perfectly; there is a good deal in that, I believe. Many pretty women are slovens or absolutely tasteless. I should hate that in my wife. I never saw Dora look otherwise than charming, this evening especially. She never wears things that rustle or fall stiffly, she and Miss Marriott are alike in that. By the bye, how that girl looked at me this afternoon as she handed me back Dora's letter. There was a sort of pained, beseeching expression in her eyes that I could not make out, and which haunts me rather. I have a notion that she is not quite so happy as she used to be, and yet it must be my fancy. Well, I won't think about that this evening, I am always questioning Miss Marriott's looks. I want to make up my mind if it would not be as well to say something to Dora; if things are to be it would be just as well to feel one's way a little. have a notion this shilly-shallying may lead to some sort of mischief presently. I never know quite how I stand with her and what is expected of me. If a thing is to be done one need not take all one's life doing it,' finished Garth, pulling himself together with a quick movement as though he would shake the courage and determination into him.

'Men make their own fate, it is for them to choose; no one need make mistakes with their eyes open.' Why did that speech of Queenie's suddenly recur to him? 'If they make a poor thing of their own life it is not for them to complain.' The little protest came to him almost painfully as the gong sounded, and he went downstairs.

Dora looked up at him rather curiously from under her white eyelids as he came into the room, holding his head high and carrying himself as though he knew the world was before him. He returned Mr. Cunningham's affectionate greeting in a frank, offhand way.

'Well, Garth, you are rather a stranger to the Vicarage;

but I am glad to see you here again, my dear fellow. How are the sisters? and how is that young scapegrace of a Ted?'

'All well, and I only wish you could say the same, Mr. Cunningham,' began Garth heartily; but, as the Vicar sighed heavily, Dora shook her fair head at him.

'Poor dear Flo!' she said softly, as though speaking out her father's thought. 'But papa must eat his dinner, and then he has some business on which to consult you, Mr. Clayton; troubles will always keep, and it is no good papa spoiling his digestion by dwelling on them, is it?' finished Dora with tranquil philosophy, and Garth took the hint.

There was no sad talk after that. The Vicar still shook his head lugubriously at intervals, but he did ample justice to the excellent repast before him, and even brought up some

Hermitage with his own hands for Garth to taste.

The young man drank it with a little show of indifference, more assumed than real. It was not that the rarity and flavour of Mr. Cunningham's wine pleased him, but that the attention shown him made him a little dizzy. More than once some dish for which he had expressed a predilection had been brought to him.

'I knew you would like this Mayonnaise. Mrs. Gilbert has made it exactly to your taste,' Dora said to him with an engaging smile.

Garth, who was only human, and not yet thirty, felt the delicate flattery thrill through him like a personal compliment.

He was sorry when Dora left the room, and Mr. Cunning-ham drew his chair nearer and plunged into the business that required his assistance. With all his good nature and natural aptitude for these sort of things, he found it very difficult to lend his undivided attention. 'Why did she prepare that pudding with the pine-apple sauce with her own hands, because Mrs. Gilbert would have spoiled it?' he thought, as he balanced his spoon idly on the edge of his coffee-cup, thereby imperilling Mr. Cunningham's favourite Wedgewood. She had never condescended to show him such honour before; no wonder he was dizzy, and turned rather a deaf ear on the Vicar's tedious explanations. His absent, fidgety demeanour attracted the attention of his host after a time.

'I am keeping you too long with all these bothering de-

tails, you want to be in the next room,' he said, with a meaning smile, over which the young man blushed hotly.

'Not until you have finished with me. Is there anything more that I can do in your absence?' he stammered, feeling a little foolish and crestfallen.

No, no; Beale can do the rest. Go along with you, and tell Dora to let me know when tea is ready,' and the Vicar flung his cambric handkerchief over his white head and composed himself for a nap.

Garth had not quite got rid of his flush when he opened the drawing-room door. Mr. Cunningham's smile had rather daunted him, but Dora gave him a bright little glance as he entered.

'How long you and papa have been over your stupid business! I am so tired of being alone,' she said, welcoming the truant with a fascinating attempt at a pout.

The shaded lamps had been lighted in the Vicarage drawingroom; there was a burnished gleam of silver and china on the little square tea-table. A wood fire had been kindled on the hearth, but the windows and the glass door of the conservatory were open. Dora sat in her low carved chair with her lap full of silks and crewels.

'I wanted to get away. I think your father saw that at last, for he set me free. I am afraid he thought me very inattentive,' replied Garth, taking up his usual position against the mantelpiece.

He was still a little flushed, more from that smile than the Hermitage, and his eyes had a quick excited gleam in them. Dora understood it all perfectly, but she was quite mistress of the situation. Woman-like, she felt a little triumph in the exercise of her power.

'If I were to yield another hair's-breadth there is no telling what the foolish fellow would do,' she thought, not without a quickening of the pulse under those intent looks. The danger had a subtle sweetness even for her, though she was too self-controlled to be swayed by it.

'Do sit down; you are so tall that it quite makes me ache to look up at you,' she said, with that pretty attempt at a pout; 'and then I want to speak to you seriously.'

Garth might be pardoned if he took that petulant

command as an invitation to draw his chair rather closely. But though Dora saw her mistake she went on calmly, quite ignoring the near neighbourhood of the infatuated young man.

'When one sees a thing clearly it is always best to speak of it,' began Dora, busily sorting her crewels, and making believe not to notice that Garth had his elbow on the back of her chair. 'Langley is too lenient, and then Miss Cosie is not one for lecturing; but still some one ought to speak.'

'On what subject?' demanded Garth absently. He was

wondering how he ought to begin.

'Why, on the subject of Miss Marriott's dress, of course,' returned Dora briskly and with emphasis. 'If no one will speak, neither Langley nor Miss Cosie, and then Cathy is such a child, it seems to me as though I ought not to keep silence.'

'Miss Marriott's dress!' interrupted Garth in an astonished voice. 'Why, Dora, what can you be meaning? The subject has nothing to do with us—with you and me—at all.'

. 'Every subject has to do with me that touches on questions of right and wrong,' she returned with dignity. 'I consider Miss Marriott's general style of dress and appearance is perfectly unsuitable to a village schoolmistress, and sets the worst possible example to the grown-up girls in Hepshaw.'

'This is perfectly incomprehensible,' he replied, secretly exasperated by the turn the conversation was taking, and rather resenting this undeserved attack on his protégée. 'Langley and I are always praising Miss Marriott's quiet,

unobtrusive style.'

'One knows what to expect of a gentleman when there is a pretty face in question,' retorted Dora, with a touch of scorn in her voice. 'Not that I call Miss Marriott pretty. She has such singular eyes, and then I never admire a brown skin. But I must own I thought better things of Langley.'

'I am completely at sea,' returned Garth, lifting his eye-

brows in comical perplexity.

That little speech of Dora's about Miss Marriott's eyes and brown skin amused him. Could she be jealous of the young stranger he had taken under his brotherly protection?

Garth's elbow rested still more comfortably on the back of her chair as this little bit of self-flattery intruded itself.

'I always see Miss Marriott in a plain black stuff gown, with just a linen collar or bit of frilling round her throat. I

don't see how any one could dress more plainly.'

'That shows how much you men notice things,' returned Dora still more scornfully, and somewhat irate at his incredulity. Garth was never very easy to convince. 'Black stuff! a fine cashmere, that cost four shillings a yard if it cost a penny, and looking as if it were made by the most finished dressmaker in Carlisle, and a Leghorn hat trimmed with an ostrich feather.'

Garth looked a little sheepish at this. The feather had certainly nonplussed him. It was quite true that during the last few Sundays Miss Marriott had appeared in church in a shady hat with a long drooping feather that had suited her remarkably well.

'I cannot deny the feather,' he rejoined, with a rueful smile at his defeat.

The admission mollified Dora.

'And then her boots and gloves—best Paris kid, and boots that look certainly as though they were from a French maker. Ah, you cannot deceive me! Do you think such a fine lady is likely to benefit the village girls? Why, if Miss Stapleton were to mount a feather like that papa and I would be down upon her at once.'

'I should not compare Miss Marriott and Miss Stapleton,' a little testily. 'Miss Marriott is better born and educated. She is a country vicar's daughter. I am sure that you can-

not deny that she is a perfect gentlewoman.'

'I do not deny that she is a very pleasant-mannered, well-looking young woman,' returned Dora, in an aggravating manner, crossing her plump hands on her lap and looking up at Garth serenely. 'I take a great interest in Miss Marriott, not only for her own sake, but because she is yours and Langley's protegee. When one sees a thing is wrong it is a duty to speak, and I hope I shall always do my duty,' finished Dora virtuously.

Garth was silent. He was quite used to these sort of lectures from the young mistress of Crossgill Vicarage. It

had long been an admitted fact between them that her mission extended to Hepshaw. The village schoolmistresses had been perpetual thorns in her side; their dress and demeanour, their teaching and morals, had always been carefully investigated. The last Hepshaw mistress had been a weak, pale-eyed creature, with no will of her own, and no particular views,—a washed-out piece of humanity, as Garth termed her,—but highly esteemed and lamented by Miss Cunningham.

Garth could not forbear a smile of secret amusement at Dora's persevering efforts to draw Miss Marriott under her yoke. The contest between the two interested and provoked him. He had taken upon himself to lecture Queenie on her stiff-necked demeanour towards Miss Cunningham, and now he was ready to take up cudgels in her defence.

'I think you are a little hard upon her,' he began at last

slowly, and then he stopped.

Why should he concern himself with things so wholly feminine? most likely Dora was right, at least he had never found her wrong in anything yet. Perhaps that drooping hat and feather might be a snare to the female population of Hepshaw. It had startled even him as she had walked up the aisle that Sunday. Let them fight it out; he was not sitting there in that lamplit fragrant drawing-room to talk about Miss Marriott. He was Dora's guest, summoned there by her own will and behest. Mr. Cunningham did not often leave them alone like this, the opportunity was too precious to be wasted.

Garth moved a little restlessly as he pondered thus with his arm against Dora's chair. The shapely head was very close to him. For the first time he felt an irresistible impulse to touch the smooth coil of fair hair with his hand, it looked as fine and silky as a child's.

'Dora,' he began, and then again he stopped. 'Dora,' and this time he came a little closer, almost leaning over her, but not touching her, 'shall things be different between you and me!'

He had taken her by surprise, and for an instant she turned pale, but she recovered herself immediately.

'Mr. Clayton,' she returned, carefully avoiding his eyes,

and sorting her crewels industriously, 'I thought I had broken you off that foolish habit of calling me Dora.'

Garth drew back, stung by her tone.

'What does that mean?' he inquired hotly. 'If I am not to call you Dora how are things to be put straight between us? I thought we understood each other, and that the time had come for me to speak. What does this mean?' continued the fiery young man, twisting his moustache in sudden excitement and wrath.

'Did you think to-night was a fitting opportunity,' inquired Dora with mournful gentleness, 'with poor darling Flo, and papa in such a state? How could you be so inconsiderate and selfish?' looking at him with appealing blue eyes.

But Garth's feelings had been outraged, and no soft looks could mollify him. He was a well-meaning, plain-spoken young fellow, and he had brought himself with much searching of conscience to the brink of an honest resolution. Dora's coldness of rebuke had wounded his susceptibility and grazed his pride. No woman should trifle with his affections, so he told himself, and least of all his old friend Dora.

'I am sure you did not mean to be inconsiderate,' she said,

looking up at him with a beseeching glance.

'I do not know what you call want of consideration,' returned Garth, with one of his rare frowns. 'I should have thought if you cared for me that trouble would have drawn us closer together, that this was the time of all others to speak'

'If I cared for you!' with reproachful sweetness. 'Oh, Mr. Clayton, how can you say such harsh things? and to me of all persons in the world! Is it my fault that darling Flo is ill, and that Bee is so young and such a wretched manager that one dares not trust things to her for a long time yet? Can I help not being my own mistress like other women, and having so many responsibilities—poor papa, and the girls, and the school, and hundreds of things?' she finished with a little pathos.

But Garth was not to be so easily appeared. His strong will was roused by opposition, and Dora must learn that he was not a man to be trifled with. A moment before he had felt a longing to press his lips to that smooth, golden coil, but now all such desire had left him.

'This is all nonsense,' he returned, almost harshly. 'We have known each other all our lives, and this has been understood between us. There are no insuperable obstacles—none, or I would not have spoken. Beatrix is seventeen, and she must learn to manage as other girls do. If you mean to sacrifice your life for a mistaken sense of duty you have no right to spoil mine with all this waiting. I am not to call you Dora; I am not to be any more to you than I have been. What does all this folly mean?' finished Garth, with angry excitement.

'It means that things cannot be different just now,' replied Dora, with real tremulousness in her voice, and now again there came that soft mistiness in her eyes. She was not offended at her lover's plain speaking; she liked Garth all the better for that manly outburst of independence. He was a little more difficult to manage than she had thought, but she was in no fear of ultimate results; he was straining at his curb, that was all.

'You must not be angry with me because I am disappointing you,' she went on, laying her hand upon his coat-sleeve. 'It is not my fault that everything depends on me, and that Bee is so helpless. Of course if one could do as one wished—' and here there was a swift downward glance, but Garth broke in upon her impatiently.

'All this is worse than nothing,' observed the exasperated young man. 'It must be yes or no with me; this going backwards and forwards and holding one's faith in a leash would never do for me. How could a man answer for himself under such circumstances? If you send me away from you you will find it very hard to recall me, Dora; you must think of that!' with a sudden change of voice, at once injured and affectionate, and which went far to mollify the effect of his former harshness.

'You will always know I cared, and that one could not do as one wished. If we are Christians we know that duty cannot be shirked,' began Dora with beautiful solemnity, and a certain brightness of earnestness in her blue eyes; but at that moment her father entered. 'Papa,' she said, as Garth rose hastily, almost shaking off her hand in his excitement, 'what a long nap you have been taking! Mr. Clayton and I have been talking for ever so long, and the tea is quite cold.'

'I hope not, Dorrie,' observed Mr. Cunningham, seating himself comfortably in his elbow-chair and warming his white hand over the blaze.

'Ah, but it is perfectly lukewarm,' returned his daughter cheerfully, as she walked to the tea-table and poured out the soothing beverage. She was quite tranquil as she sat there under the shaded lamps. The danger had been met and encountered, but she had remained mistress of the situation. It was natural for him to feel a little downcast and aggrieved over his defeat. Men were such creatures of impulse.

'He is angry with me now, but he will come round by and by,' thought Dora, watching him with affectionate solicitude. In her breast she was very fond and proud of him, though the young mistress of Crossgill was not ready to lay down her prerogative and rights at his behests. 'I am not afraid of his taking the bit between his teeth,' she said to herself, with a smile of incredulity at the bare idea. How was Garth Clayton, her old friend and playmate, to prove unfaithful to her?

As for Garth, he conducted himself as most high-spirited young men do under the circumstances. He took his cup of cold tea from her hand mutely, much as though it were a dose of poison, and stood aloof, scarcely looking at her, and talking faster than usual to Mr. Cunningham.

He did not make much of a reply when, after prayers, Dora lighted the candle in his silver candlestick as well as her father's, and hoped he would sleep well.

'Good-night, Dorrie, my dear,' observed her father, kissing her smooth forehead just above her eyes. 'Don't forget you have a long journey before you to-morrow.'

'Good-night, Miss Cunningham,' said Garth, with pointed emphasis as he just touched her hand.

He thought the coldness of his tone would have cut her to the heart, but she merely smiled in his face.

Garth went upstairs in a tumult of vexation and excitement. The porch-chamber, with its sweet perfume of fresh lavender, no longer charmed him. The girlish reflection of Dora with its arms full of lilies angered him. He turned his back upon it and sat down by the open window.

He was bitterly mortified and disappointed. Dora had been his fate, he told himself, and now his fate had eluded him. She had drawn him on with sweet looks and half-sentences of fondness all these years, and now she had declined to yield to his first honest efforts of persuasion. Well, he was not the man to be fooled by any girl, though she had golden hair and knew how to use her eyes. She was managing him for her own purposes, but he would prove to her that he was not to be managed. He would shake off her influence much as he had done her hand on his coat-sleeve just now; all the more that such shaking off might be difficult to him. There were other women in the world, thank Heaven, beside Dora—women who would be more subservient to his masculine royalty, whose wills and lives could be moulded by his.

His heart was still whole within him, though his pride was so grievously wounded. He knew that, as he turned his back upon her picture, and sat down in his sullen resentment. There was no inward bleeding, no sickness of repressed hopes driven back upon themselves, no yearning void, only the bitterness of an angry wound, against which he called out in his young man's impatience. The golden head would not come and nestle against him when he longed for it, and now he thrust it from him.

As for Dora, she went up to her room in perfect tranquillity. 'Foolish fellow, how angry he was with me,' she said to herself as she brushed out the long fair hair that fell round her in a halo. Her blue eyes looked through it like Undine's. 'I wonder if all lovers would be so troublesome; it wanted all one's tact to keep him within bounds. I wish Flo were not so young, and that Bee were less helpless,' she went on, with a sigh. 'It will be hard work keeping him in good humour the next year or two, but it would never do to engage myself to him as things are now. I have enough on my hands without that,' and with another involuntary sigh, as she thought of Garth's handsome countenance, Dora Cunningham, like a right-minded young woman, put away the subject from her mind and went to sleep.

#### CHAPTER XXXI

#### IN THE GLOAMING

'So she loved, and she was happy,
As if walking in Paradise;
Nay, as heaven he seemed above her,
This love of her own heart's choice.
It was not his birth or riches,
But that he was born to bless,
With the treasure of his wisdom,
And the wealth of his tenderness.'

ISA CRAIG-KNOX.

DORA'S sleep was quite peaceful and unbroken, while Garth tossed restlessly on his bed half the night, staring open-eyed into the darkness. She came down in the morning in her pretty travelling dress looking as fresh and bright as possible. She was not even pale as she had been the previous evening; possibly the excitement of last night had stimulated her, and roused her from her sadness.

She was thinking more of Flo than of Garth this morning. With all her coolness of judgment, and her disposition to meddle in all things spiritual and material, Dora dearly loved her young sisters, and was warmly beloved by them in return. Beatrix was at times almost too much for her, with her helplessness and impulsive ways, but Flo was to her as the apple of her eye.

'My poor Flo, I hope they will not have cut off her hair, papa,' she observed tenderly; 'she has such pretty hair, though it is darker than mine.'

'Ah, Dorrie, my dear, it is a bad business I fear,' returned her father mournfully. 'I always said that I disliked those foreign schools; and then those German doctors!' 'Now, papa, it is only Bee's absurd letter that has made you so faint-hearted,' replied Dora cheerfully, 'as though girls of seventeen are to be trusted, and Bee especially!'

'I think Beatrix is remarkably sensible for her age,' observed Garth in a caustic tone. 'I cannot understand your always undervaluing her; in my opinion she has twice the amount of common sense that Florence has,' he went on in a contradictory manner.

Garth had slept badly, a rare occurrence in his healthy, well-regulated life, and one that he was likely to remember for a long time with a sense of injury; and he was irritable in consequence, and in a bad humour with himself and all the world. Nothing would have pleased him better this morning than a downright quarrel with Dora; but Dora's perfect temper was invulnerable.

'That only shows how men judge of girls' characters,' she returned, with a little shrug and an amused smile. 'Because Bee is better looking, and has a nice complexion, she is endowed with a double portion of common sense. Oh, you men!' shaking her head and laughing in a pitying sort of

'We men are tolerably hard in our judgment sometimes,' returned Garth, looking at her with a gleam of anger in his eyes; but Dora took no notice of the ill-concealed sarcasm.

It was so natural for him to feel sore, poor fellow, under the circumstances. She thought it would want a good deal of coaxing and finesse to charm him into good humour again. She was very considerate and mindful of his comfort throughout the whole of breakfast-time, sweetening and preparing his coffee with extra care, and even bringing him some favourite preserve with her own hands; but her little overtures towards reconciliation were all rejected. Garth put the preserve away somewhat ostentatiously, and bore himself as though he had received an injury for which there could be no forgiveness. He stood aloof as the servants crowded round the door and the young mistress dispensed her parting injunction. When the luggage was on the carriage, and the Vicar had taken down his felt hat, he came forward and handed Dora into the carriage with much dignity.

'I hope you will have a tolerably pleasant journey, and find the invalid better,' he said very gravely; 'please give my love to Beatrix.' He had not spoken more than a dozen words throughout the whole of breakfast-time, but he could not forbear this parting thrust.

'And not to Flo! not to poor darling Flo!' returned Dora, looking at him with reproachful sweetness. 'Oh, you poor fellow, I am so sorry for you,' her eyes seemed to say, as she waved her hand, and the carriage disappeared down the

village.

Garth threw his portmanteau into the dogcart somewhat vehemently when it came up to the door. The old nurse put her hand on his arm with the familiarity of a trusted friend, and tried to detain him, but he was in no mood for her garrulity.

'Dear Miss Dora, she is a blessing to us all, is she not, Mr. Clayton? such a pretty creature, and with such wise, womanly ways; for all the world like her mother,' cried Nurse, with the ready tear of old age trickling down her wrinkled cheek. 'The others are dear girls, bless their sweet faces, but they are not equal to Miss Dora.'

'Of course not, Nurse; there could not be two such paragons in one house,' returned Garth, squeezing the old woman's hard hand, and trying to whistle as he mounted to his seat and took the reins in hand, but the whistle was a failure. He looked up at the porch-room somewhat bitterly as he drove off. He was shaking off the dust of the place from his feet, so he told himself, but there was a hard, resentful pain at his heart as he did so.

No one knew what to make of the young master when he appeared hot and dusty at the works. Two or three of the men had been soundly rated for some slight omission of duty, and one of the severest lectures that he had ever received from his brother had been dinned into Ted's astonished ear.

'I am sick of your laziness and want of punctuality; if you cannot fulfil your duties properly you must find work elsewhere,' stormed the young master of Warstdale. With all his sweet temper, Ted had much ado not to flare up and get into a passion.

'Haven't we all caught it nicely at the works! there is a screw loose somewhere,' observed Ted confidentially to his sisters that evening, as Garth drove the dogcart round to the stables.

The brothers had driven home from the quarry in perfect silence, and Ted, who was still a little sore over the rating he had received, had made no attempt to promote cheerfulness.

'I hope there is nothing wrong between him and Dora,'

observed Langley, dropping her work a little anxiously.

Poor soul, her own troubles had made her nervous; but on that point Ted could not enlighten her. Evidently Garth had attempted to recover his temper, for he came in presently, and greeted his sisters affectionately.

'I hope you have lost your headache, Langley ?' he said, as he took up the paper-knife and the latest periodical, and

withdrew with them to the window.

'Did you see them off! Have they had any better accounts of Florence? You look tired and done up, Garth,' inquired his sister anxiously.

'Yes; they went off all right. Miss Cunningham sends her love to you and Cathy. They made me very comfortable

as usual, and gave me my old room.'

Garth was trying to read by the evening light, and his

face was hidden.

'One is always comfortable at the Vicarage; Dora is such a capital manager,' returned Langley, feeling her way in feminine fashion. 'Poor girl, Florence's illness must be a sad trial to her.'

'Humph! she takes it as coolly as she does most things. When are the lights coming, and what has become of tea?' demanded Garth, a little irritably; and Langley knew that

she was not to ask any more questions.

A good night's rest did much towards restoring Garth's outward equanimity, but he still chafed secretly under the mortification he had undergone with a soreness that surprised himself. The check he had received had angered and embittered him. He was not in love with Dora, after the usual interpretation of the word; nevertheless, her yoke lay heavy upon him. The friendship between them had grown with his growth; he had learned to see with her eyes, and read with

her judgment. In a cool, temperate sort of way he had loved and wooed her from his earliest manhood. He had been a trifle indifferent to women in general. When the time came to take a wife, that wife should be Dora.

But now the plan of his life was disarranged. He had waited long enough, and now he told himself that no more time should be given her. He would shake off the dust of the place from his feet; he would bear himself as a stranger towards her and her belongings; but even while his indignation was hot within him, he knew that such resolution would be vain. Not even now had he wholly relinquished all hopes True, she had sinned against him, and the gravity of the offence demanded a fitting punishment. Well, he would hold aloof from her, and treat her on all occasions with studied coldness, until she would rid herself of this womanish folly, and capitulate on his own terms. Then, and then only, would he forgive her, and raise her to the former measure of The surrender on her part must be total. should be no softness, no half measures, no conciliating persuasion on his; for the future it should be yes, or at least no, between them. Garth was just in that dangerous mood when a straw might decide the current of his will, when a trifle might widen the breach which a word at one time could have spanned. Dora had little idea of the danger she risked when she sent her lover from her discontented and dissatisfied. 'You may find it very difficult to recall me, Dora,' he had said to her, with some instinctive prevision of the truth, but she had not believed him.

For the first time the young master of Warstdale found himself restless and unhappy; his sleepless night still abided in his mind as an undeserved and lasting injury. The next day had set in wet and stormy; heavy autumnal rains swept across the moors, and flooded the country road, and the little straggling town of Hepshaw. Garth had driven himself and Ted in the same taciturn fashion from the quarry, and both had entered the house, shivering and uncomfortable, in their dripping garments.

'O, you poor dear creatures,' cried Cathy, flying out into the hall to receive them; but Ted waved her off gravely, and shook himself like a wet Newfoundland. "Talk not of wasted young raindrops! these raindrops never are wasted.

If they enrich not the coat of my brother, their waters returning
Back to my hat, shall fill it full of brown moisture;
For that which the Ulster sends forth returns again to the oil-cloth.
Patience, accomplish thy labour; accomplish thy shaking, my brother;
Broadcloth and buckskin are strong, and patience and muscle are stronger."

'Bosh,' growled Garth in a sulky undertone, as he pushed past him somewhat curtly.

Ted shook his head mournfully,

" I knew a young man nice to see,"

continued the incorrigible boy;

""Beware! beware!
Trust him not, he will bully thee;
Take care! take care!"

'What is the matter with him, Teddie, dear!' asked his sister coaxingly.

'Hush!' in a melodramatic tone; 'meddle not with wateries that belong not to thy female province, Catherina mia. How do you know what dark deed fetters the conscience of that unhappy young man? Did you remark the gleam in his eye, the frown on his brow, as he rushed past me just now? remorse only could have kindled that fury. Dora and despair speak in every feature.'

'Oh, do be quiet, you ridiculous boy, and give me a sensible answer.'

But nothing was farther from Ted's purpose. His aggravated feelings needed some outlet. And when Garth made his appearance, refreshed and rehabited, he found Cathy sitting on the stairs in fits of merriment, while Ted strutted to and fro spouting pages of nonsense.

He stopped and looked a little foolish at this sudden apparition; but his brother took no notice of his confusion.

'If you keep your wet things on any longer you will have an attack of rheumatism,' he remarked coldly, as he made his way past them to the hall door. Both of them started as it slammed violently after him.

'Where has he gone in all the rain?' asked Cathy, in much distress; but Ted only shrugged his shoulders, and tried

not to look pleased. For once his brother's absence was a relief.

Garth was in no mood to-night for his sisters' society and Ted's ceaseless fire of puns. The quiet home evening, with its work and music and gentle gossip, would have jarred on him in his present state of mind. It was true, Langley's tact was seldom at fault, and the others could be chided and frowned into silence; but still he would have been loath to mar their enjoyment. He was jaded and tired; the day's work had been done against the grain, and he needed rest and refreshment sorely. Some impulse, for which he could not account, led him across to the cottage.

The rain was still falling heavily as he plodded down the miry lane; but a warm, welcoming gleam shone enticingly from one lattice window across the road. He would step in and surprise them, he thought, as he gently lifted the latch. He and Cathy often stole upon them in this way; they liked to see Emmie's delighted clap of the hands and Queenie's pleased start when they looked up and saw their friendly intruder.

The door of the parlour stood open. He was in full possession of the pretty, homely picture long before they saw him standing on the threshold. Tea was on the little round table, but the candles were still unlighted; Emmie was curled up on the rocking-chair, watching Queenie, as she knelt on the rug with a plate of crisp white cakes in her hand.

They were evidently some chef-d'œuvre of her own. She was still girded with her cooking apron; the firelight shone on her white, dimpled arms and flushed face; all sort of ruddy gleams touched her brown hair. She gave a little satisfied laugh as she regarded the cakes.

'They are just as light as Mrs. Fawcett's, are they not, Emmie?'

'Yes, they are lovely; you are quite a genius, Queen; but do go on with the story, we have just come to the interesting part. Poor Madeleine! you must make it end happily. I never, never could bear a sad finish.'

'Those sort of stories never end happily,' returned Queenie, in a musing tone, shielding her face from the flame; 'they are just like life in that. We have no King Cophetus now-

adays to endow poor maidens with their nobleness; it is all matter-of-fact prose now.'

'Why did you make poor Madeleine love the squire then the village carpenter would have suited her much better; and then she and he, and that dear little sister Kitty, could all have lived in that pretty cottage under the chestnuts. Can't you alter the story, Queen?'

Queenie shook her head remorselessly. 'It is a pity, but one can't alter these sort of things, Emmie. Poor Madeleine loved, and suffered, and lost, as other women have done since this world began; but she would not have been

without her suffering for all that.'

'I can't understand you,' returned the child, with tears in her eyes. 'It was such a beautiful story, quite your best,

and now you have spoiled the ending.'

'Life is full of these sad finishes,' replied the young story-teller oracularly; 'there is a fate in such things, I believe. Don't be unhappy, darling, poor Madeleine would have been miserable in that cottage under the chestnuts; she would much rather have lived in her attic with dear little Kitty, and watched the young squire riding by on his grey horse. Evening after evening, as they disappeared in the distance, she would think of the lovely young wife that awaited him. You may be sure that her heart was full of blessings for them both, even though she felt a little sad and lonely sometimes.'

'But she would not have been quite happy, even with Kitty,' persisted the child in a troubled tone; 'and then poor

little Kitty would have been so sorry.'

What was there in the child's artless words that made Queenie suddenly flush and tremble?

'Hush, you must not say that; it is only a story we are telling, it is not true, any of it. No one is perfectly happy in this world; there are always wishes unfulfilled, unsatisfied longings, troubles everywhere.'

'Yes, I know; but somehow it reminded me of you and me,' interrupted Emmie, with a little sob. 'If you were ever unhappy, Queen,—in that way I mean,—I think I should break my heart.'

'Oh, hush, my darling!' snatching the thin hands, and covering them with kisses, 'it is only a story; you must not

fret. Do you think Madeleine would have been wicked and made herself miserable, just because she loved the noblest man that ever lived? No, no, my pet; not when she had her own little sister to love and cherish.'

'Do you always tell stories in the gloaming? that seems a very pretty one. I suppose I ought to apologise for being an uninvited auditor,' observed Garth, as he quietly walked in and took possession of the hearth.

Emmie gave a little shriek of surprise as her sister

hurriedly disengaged herself from her embrace.

'How long have you been standing there? Did you mean to startle us? You are very naughty; you have made Queenie look quite pale, and she had such a colour the minute before.'

'Have I startled you! that was very wrong of me,

returned Garth, taking her hand.

Garth was speaking and looking in his usual way; but in reality he was taken aback by Queenie's evident agitation. She had always met and greeted him brightly; why had she grown so strangely pale at the sight of him this evening? The brown eyes that had often haunted him had not yet been lifted to his face.

'Have I startled you?' he persisted, still detaining her until she should answer him.

'A little. I am sorry you should have heard all that foolish talk,' she stammered, growing suddenly hot over the remembrance, and not venturing to encounter his candid glance.

What had possessed her to concoct such a story? Would

he read the secret meaning?

'I must make the tea, the kettle has been singing for the last half-hour,' she observed hurriedly, glad of an excuse to move away and recover herself.

Garth did not ask any more troublesome questions; he turned his attention to Emmie, taking possession of the rocking-chair, while the child took her little stool beside him.

. Queenie left them to themselves for a long time. All sorts of preparations seemed needful before the meal was declared ready. The candles were still unlighted, and she made no attempt to kindle them. Garth threw on another

pine knot, and the warm ruddy light was soon diffused through the little room. As Queenie moved about, contriving endless errands for herself, she had no idea that Garth was furtively

watching her.

'Why had she grown so pale? what was there in his sudden appearance to confuse her?' the young man was asking himself with a little throb of curious excitement. Somehow this unusual agitation on Queenie's part soothed and tranquillised him; he began to think less bitterly of Dora; some subtle influence, half-painful and half-pleasurable, seemed to steep his senses.

Garth was quite unconscious why he wanted Queenie to look at him. He watched her graceful movements about the room with quiet satisfaction. Two days before his fancy had been taken by the soft whiteness of a dress that flowed smoothly and did not rustle, and by the shining of golden hair in the lamplight; and now a black serge dress with snowy collars and cuffs charmed him with its nun-like simplicity.

What was there in these two women, so utterly dissimilar, that fascinated him? As far as he knew he was not in love with either, although he had given the preference to Dora—Dora, who allured and yet repelled him, and for whom he

now felt such bitterness of resentment.

'Why are you so quiet, Mr. Garth? no one has been telling you sad stories,' cried Emmie, lifting her kitten on to his knee. 'I wish you would speak to Queen, she always makes things end so badly.'

'I am afraid your sister draws from life,' he returned absently. He spoke without intention, but a shadow swept

over Queenie's sensitive face.

'You ought not to have listened,' she said reproachfully. 'It was only some nonsense to please Emmie. I make up things, any rubbish pleases her; sometimes it is a fairy story, or some odd bits one picks out of books; nothing comes amiss,' she went on, bent on defending herself.

'And you think a girl can make herself happy with an unrequited love preying on her?' he observed in a quizzical tone. 'I don't know what women would say to such heresy. I think Emmie was right, and that little Kitty would have

a great deal to bear.'

Queenie was silent.

'Confess that you don't believe such a thing could be possible.'

'What do you mean?' looking up at him with varying

colour.

'I mean that a girl, that Madeleine, for example, could make herself comfortable under such circumstances.'

'Did I say a word about comfort?' she returned with spirit. 'Of course Madeleine thought her trouble a trouble, and never called it by any other name.'

'And of course she made herself and little Kitty miserable?' he rejoined, enjoying the play of words, but watching her keenly all the time.

'She did nothing of the kind,' flaring up with sudden heat. 'You have not heard half my story, or you would

not say such a thing.'

'Suppose you were to enlighten me,' with some raillery in his tone. 'Your heroine is not different from the ordinary run of women; and most of them make themselves miserable under the circumstances.'

'Not women like my Madeleine,' with a sudden lighting up of earnestness in her face. 'I don't think men are quite like that; they don't understand.'

'What is it they don't understand?' he asked, somewhat

puzzled.

'The blessedness of giving,' she returned simply; 'the privilege of being able to see and love what is highest and best without hope or thought of return. Some women feel like that.'

'But not many,' he replied, touched by her earnestness,

and conscious again of that strange thrill.

'No, not many,' looking at him gravely. 'The greater number dread suffering, and fear to enter into the cloud. They let men spoil their lives, and then the disappointment hardens and embitters them; instead of which they ought to go on simply loving, and being sorry, but not too sorry, about things.'

'But suppose the object is not worthy? You know how often that is the case,' he demanded gravely.

'Ah, that is the greatest pity of all. There is no

trouble like that, to see the degradation of one we love; indeed, that must be terrible!

'Ah, your golden rule of giving will not hold there!'

'Why not?' she asked quietly. 'I heard a sad story once, when Emmie and I were at Granite Lodge. One of the governesses had had a dreadful trouble. She was engaged for some years to a man who professed a great affection for her, and suddenly the news of his marriage reached her.'

'Well ?'

'Well, she staggered under the blow, but she bore it somehow. It would have nearly killed some women. She just took up her life and did the best she could with it. "I am keeping it all for him," she said to me once, with such a mournful smile; "when he wants it, it will be ready for him, but it will not be here."'

'Keeping what?' asked Garth, somewhat absently.

'Why, the love he had thrown away as worthless,' she returned with kindling eyes. 'Don't you think the faith of that poor German governess had something noble in it? She had forgotten her own wrongs and his fickleness. In the world to come it should be all right between them.'

'Wasn't that rather far-fetched?'

'Not at all,' returned the girl warmly; 'those who have sympathy here must have sympathy there. There will be no broken lives in heaven.'

'No; of course not,' feeling himself a little out of his element, but strangely attracted by the eloquence of Queenie's eyes.

As for Queenie, she had almost forgotten to whom she was speaking. She was wrapped up, absorbed in her subject;

all sorts of deep thoughts stirred within her.

These things were true to her, but she felt with a kind of wonder that he did not understand. Perhaps he felt with a young man's reverence the mystery of the world to come. Some men have a great dread of touching sacred things with unconsecrated hands; but Queenie's young eyes had the fearlessness of the eagle; they looked up unblenchingly at the light. What was the use of separating things spiritual from things material in her creed? Love was the ladder that Jacob saw reaching from earth to heaven; evermore there

were angels ascending and descending. The doctrine of the communion of saints had infinite readings.

'Those that have sympathy here have sympathy there,' she had asserted with entire faith and simplicity. Why did not he, why did not everybody, understand?

As for Garth, he felt a little moved and excited, stirred by her earnestness, yet not wholly comprehending it, and quite out of his element.

# CHAPTER XXXII

## 'DO YOU LIKE ME AS WELL AS YOU DID THEN!'

'The true one of youth's love, proving a faithful helpmate in those years when the dream of life is over, and we live in its realities.'—Southey.

GARTH pondered somewhat heavily over Queenie's words that evening. In spite of his warm human sympathies his imagination was still undeveloped. Under the margin of those brief sentences lay unexplored meanings, whole worlds of thought and fancy that he only dimly comprehended, and yet he felt himself stirred by the girl's enthusiasm.

'You have done me good,' he said to her, when tea was over and Emmie had betaken herself to Patience. He had risen to take leave, but he still lingered, as though loath to break the tranquillity of the scene. 'Something had worried me and put me into a bad humour with myself and all the

world, but now I feel better.'

'I am glad I have done you good,' she returned simply.

When he had left her she knelt down by the hearth again and shielded her face from the flame. All sorts of bright, visionary pictures danced under the light of the spluttering fir-knots; thoughts almost too great and beautiful to be grasped brushed past her like wings.

Queenie was only dreaming, as girls will sometimes, only somehow her dreams were better than other women's realities. She was thinking of Garth, marvelling a little over his manner that evening. He had been kinder, gentler, and yet

somehow different.

She was not quite so sure, after all, that he meant to

marry Dora. She had mentioned her name once, and he had answered her in a constrained manner, and had then changed the subject. Could Miss Cunningham have given him cause for displeasure?

Queenie was not sufficiently experienced in the ways of the world to know how quickly hearts are caught at the rebound. She had no idea of the real state of the case, and that Garth's first thought in his mortification had been to seek solace in her friendship. She only knew that somehow Garth had been nicer, and she had done him good.

'What does it matter if one is disappointed here?' thought the young visionary in that first sweet gush of satisfaction, 'that it is all giving and no return—at least, not the return that one wants? life will not last for ever. In that bright hereafter there will be no marrying or giving in marriage, the Bible tells us that. Nothing but love, which, after all, is another name for life. We are only hiding our treasures now, heaping them up in silence and darkness, like that poor Fräulein Heldrig. By and by, up there, those whom we love will call to us and stretch out their hands, and we shall come bearing our sheaves with us.'

Queenie was weaving all manner of pure womanish fancies as Garth went back through the rain. The young man's pulses still throbbed with excitement. His sluggish imagination had been quickened and stirred within him; he felt with a curious, indefinable sensation that he had drifted long enough down the tide of circumstance, and that his fate approached a crisis. Would it be different to what he had planned all these years?

And that night he thought less of Dora.

How inexplicable are the ways of mankind, even the best of them. Garth, with all his uprightness and integrity, failed to see that his conduct lay open to questioning when, after this evening, he began to haunt the cottage. He was only seeking solace and forgetfulness, a healing compensation for the hurt under which he still smarted at intervals; but he had no idea that such self-indulgence might be fraught with peril to another's peace!

Queenie could not tell him if the intercourse between them were too pleasant to be perfectly harmless. The fault lay with him, not her. It was not for her to receive her benefactor coldly; and then if she could do him good.

It was true Garth seldom came alone, either Cathy or Langley or Ted were with him; but the invitations to Church-

Stile House became more frequent and pressing.

'Garth likes to see you and Emmie amongst us of an evening,' Cathy said to her more than once. 'You know what men are, my dear; they get tired of their sisters' company, and then Dora is away. I suppose that makes him so discontented and restless. Poor Florence is worse, and

there is no possibility of Dora's return at present.'

'So your brother informed me,' returned Queenie demurely; but not to Cathy did she dare hint that Miss Cunningham's absence was a relief. She was somewhat afraid of questioning her own feelings too closely at this time. The incubus that had weighed upon her spirits was removed, at least temporarily. Life was passing pleasantly with her just now; she had work enough to occupy her; a pretty cottage where she and Emmie lived like disguised princesses, and friends whom she loved and trusted to brighten her leisure hours.

'Shall I ever be so happy again in my life?' she said once to Cathy. 'I think this summer is the sunniest I have ever known. When one is so thoroughly satisfied one dreads a

change.'

'I like change,' returned Cathy boldly. 'I think a long lease of monotonous happiness would stupefy me. Life is not a mere tableland; there are mountains to ascend before one can see the view, broad rivers to cross, and long deserts to traverse; he is a poor traveller who fears either.'

'You forget Emmie and I are already footsore with our rough pilgrimage,' rejoined Queenie, with her bright quaintness. 'We have been through the Slough of Despond and

the Valley of Humiliation.'

'And the other valley that was worse,' put in Emmie, who was listening to them; 'but you only stood at the entrance, Queen; it was I who had to fight with all the hobgoblins.'

'Hush, my sweet. Yes, I know,' hastily kissing her, for Queenie could never bear to be reminded even by a word of Emmie's past danger. 'Well, we are in our land of Beulah

now, the land flowing with milk and honey.'

'It strikes me that you are very thankful for small mercies,' observed Cathy gruffly, who could never feel quite reconciled to her friend's humble employment, and who was ready to quarrel with Dora for her patronage and condescension.

'Supposing we were one day to spread golden wings and fly away,' rejoined Queenie gaily. 'Supposing some one were to leave us a fortune, and Emmie and I suddenly became grand people, would you like me better then, Cathy?'

'No; I should dislike to see you so spoiled,' she returned, frowning at the idea. 'I believe Garth and I have a monomania on that subject, we hate rich people so. I would not have you and Emmie a bit different; but, Queen,' changing her manner and speaking rather nervously, 'I can't help thinking that you are a little extravagant; Langley said so the other day.'

'Extravagant!' repeated Queenie, opening her eyes wide.

'Yes; I think Garth put it into her head, for Langley never notices those sort of things. He found out that you had hired that piano from Carlisle, and then you are always ordering pretty things for Emmie. Garth has such a horror of debt, and, as he said, two hundred a year will not buy everything; and you have not got nearly that, have you, Queen?'

'I must be more careful,' returned Queenie, evading the question. 'I am very much obliged to your brother for the hint; but there will be no fear of my getting into debt, you may assure him of that. I have had a terror of that from a child, ever since I saw the misery it involved.'

'I am thankful to hear you say so,' returned her friend, much relieved.

She had been a little bewildered by Queenie's purchases. The *ménage* of the cottage had been perfectly simple, and, with the exception of that Gainsborough hat, Queenie had kept her own and Emmie's dress strictly within bounds. But the fifty-pound note had burned a hole in her pocket, and she had begged Caleb to forward some amusing books and games

for the child's entertainment; and the expensive selection made had caused dismay to her friends at Church-Stile House

when Emmie displayed her treasures.

Queenie laughed at her friend's lecture, but it caused her a little anxiety. What would they think of her playful deception? would they consider themselves at all aggrieved at it? Garth too, with his horror of heiresses and his exaggerated notions of independence! She felt a little sinking of heart at the thought.

The autumn had set in cold and rainy, ceaseless down-pours still flooded the country; the field path to the Vicarage was impassable, and the lane almost a grey mire. Garth and Ted plodded past the cottage daily in their leathern gaiters, and Dr. Stewart shook his head ruefully when he encountered

Queenie in his rounds.

'Why don't you give your scholars a holiday, such constant wettings are good for no one?' he asked; but Queenie only laughed, and drew her old grey waterproof closer round her. After Cathy's sermon she dared not invest in a new one. She looked so bright and good-humoured, there was such a fresh radiance about her, that Dr. Stewart failed to notice the shabbiness of the garment. He only carried away with him an impression of youthful brightness that lingered long with him.

'And Miss Faith used to look like that,' he thought a

little bitterly, as he rode homeward in the darkness.

Dr. Stewart had by no means ceased his visits to the Evergreens. He still dropped in at odd times, and kept up a running fire of argument with Miss Charity, and still maintained a rigid surveillance of the books that lay on the table beside her. There was not much conversation between him and the younger sister; a hand shake and a brief word was often all that passed between them. His praises of Jean, and the merits and demerits of her housekeeping, were all retailed into Miss Hope's sympathising ear; while to the somewhat grim Miss Prudence belonged the privilege of pouring out his tea and providing the crisp griddle cakes that his soul loved. Faith felt herself somewhat out in the cold; she was younger and more attractive, but she had not Charity's wit and cleverness; in spite of all those long hours of reading,

she was often at a loss to comprehend the subject which they were discussing. She sat by a little silent and heavy-hearted over her work; it was not for her to speak if he had ceased caring to listen.

Faith was growing paler and more worn every day; the renewal of her intercourse with Dr. Stewart had brought disappointment as well as pleasure with it. True, he had brightened her life in many ways, and his brief visit was the chief event of the day, but it often left behind it a strange restlessness and sadness. In a vague sort of way she began to understand that she had not fulfilled the promise of her younger days; that he was disappointed in his ideal. The old Faith had been a brighter and more hopeful one; and at this thought the sweet face grew more troubled and downcast.

'What's to do with you, Faith! you always seem in a maze about something when Dr. Stewart is here,' Miss Charity would say sharply, when their visitor had taken himself off with a curt nod that included the whole sisterhood. It was Miss Prudence who generally let him out now; Faith did not offer to stir from her corner. How did she know whether he wanted her.

'It seems so strange that a woman of your age should find so little to say,' continued Miss Charity, with a displeased jerk of her thin ringlets.

'He only talks to you, Cara; you neither of you seem to want me,' returned poor Faith, with the least possible trace of bitterness in her tone.

She did not often retaliate, for hers was a quiet, peaceloving nature, but to-day she felt chafed even to soreness.

Never had her sister's yoke oppressed her so bitterly; never had those readings in that close hot room seemed so tedious. The novels had been replaced by biographies, all of Dr. Stewart's choice; but the pure English and the nobility of the lives delineated were lost upon Faith, chafing under a secret sense of injury, and longing to be alone with her burthen. How hard is enforced companionship, even to the most patient of us. Faith looked out wearily at the driving rain that kept her a prisoner, and deprived her of the one thing she most prized—a solitary walk.

But at night she had it out with her thoughts. would lie awake for hours, covered round by the sacred

darkness, thinking out the problem of her life.

Why had Dr. Stewart crossed her path again; to what intent and purpose? She had become resigned to her life in a weary sort of way, and that one bright summer had only lingered in her memory like a dream of good to be prized. True, it was her most precious possession, the one thing that redeemed her life from blankness; but still time had in a great measure healed the wound of her disappointment.

But now they had met again as friends, who had once been something closer to each other. True, there had been no spoken understanding between them; but there had been looks that had been as plain as words, half-sentences that conveyed whole meanings, glances of mutual trust and sympathy. Was all this to go for nothing? was he to be free, to put away the past, and forget and come again, while she

alone had been faithful?

Dr. Stewart took no apparent notice of her changed looks; he came and went in his blunt way, and left her alone in her quiet corner. Sometimes his evenings were spent at Church-Stile House or the Vicarage; now and then they heard of him making one of a merry party, and welcomed warmly everywhere.

The day after Faith had uttered her little protest to her sister the weather showed signs of breaking. The rain had abated towards afternoon, but the low grey skies and wet roads were very uninviting. Faith looked out at the prospect a little disconsolately, it seemed to her an emblem of her own

life, and then she turned to her sister.

'The rain has stopped, I think I shall go out now, Cara;

it will do my head good.'

'I thought Dr. Stewart was coming this afternoon,' returned Miss Charity, clicking her knitting-needles busily as she spoke; 'he promised to bring us more new books. You heard him say so yourself, Faith.'

'Yes, I know; but he will not miss me; he has got you to talk to him, Cara, and I feel I must have a walk. I am sure

he will understand,' she returned deprecatingly.

'Well, if you like to be so ungracious it is not my business

to interfere,' retorted Miss Charity in a displeased tone. 'If you are only going to sit in a corner and not open your lips when he comes in, you may just as well be out. But he won't have a high opinion of your politeness.'

'I cannot help that,' returned Faith wearily.

Another afternoon of needlework and her sister's sharp speeches was not to be borne. She began to feel a dread of these visits, they made her so uncomfortable.

'Well, put on your waterproof, if you must go,' snapped Miss Charity, aggravated at Faith's unwonted resolution. 'The rain will only keep off for an hour, and you will get

nicely soaked.' And Faith meekly acquiesced.

The waterproof was not a becoming garment, it was almost as shabby as Queenie's; the shapeless folds quite disguised her neat figure. She had on her old brown hat too, that suited her less well than her little Quaker bonnets; but Faith knew she would have one of Charity's sharp lectures on extravagance if she got her nice bonnet ribbons soiled, for, with their modest expenditure, even bonnet ribbons had to be considered.

It was a severe shock to her womanly vanity when, a little way down the road, she met Dr. Stewart. The grey water-proof might be considered fit raiment for such an uncertain afternoon, but the old brown hat! Faith smarted with mortified vanity down to her finger-ends.

He was on foot, as it happened, and he turned back and walked with her a little way, but he scanned the cloak and

the hat rather quizzically as he did so.

'So you went out to avoid me, did you, Miss Faith?' he said good-humouredly; but the sudden question grazed the truth so closely that Faith's pale cheeks flamed up in a moment.

'I have not been out for three days, and then my head has been so bad,' she stammered. She was not asking for his sympathy, but she wished to defend herself from all charge of rudeness.

'Do you always suffer from these headaches?' he asked suddenly.

'No, not always; but they have been pretty bad lately,' she returned indifferently. 'I suppose the close room does it.

Cara is so afraid of draughts, and so much reading does not suit me.'

'I think the others ought to take their turn. I mean to tell Miss Charity so some day.'

'Oh no; pray do not,' in much distress. 'It does not really hurt me, not much; and Cara does so dislike Hope's reading; it is too loud and fast for an invalid.'

'She must be taught to read slower then.'

'Oh no; you must not say anything about it,' imploringly. 'I have nothing else to do but to wait upon Cara, it is right for me to do it; and if it hurts me what does it matter? We cannot live for our own pleasure,' continued Faith, walking fast and nervously, but he checked her.

'Slower, please; I had no idea you were such an energetic walker. I want to talk to you, not that you ever honour me with many words. I am not to be included in the list of your duties, eh?' with a sidelong glance of mingled fun and earnestness.

'I am afraid you have thought me very rude,' in a subdued voice.

'No; I have only found you a little depressing. What's been the matter with you all this time, Miss Faith? I am an old friend, and you might be frank with me.'

'There is nothing the matter,' she returned in much confusion, thereby burthening her conscience with a whole falsehood. But how could she hint to him the reason of her weariness?

Dr. Stewart pocketed the falsehood with perceptible distrust.

'You are growing thinner and more nervous every day and there is no cause for it? Do you expect me to believe that?' with an incredulous laugh. 'I mean to put a stop to these pernicious readings, so look out for yourself, Miss Faith.'

'Oh, you must not; indeed you must not, Dr. Stewart,' she implored, with tears in her eyes. 'It is Cara's one pleasure, and I cannot have it interfered with. You have no right to interfere,' she continued, turning upon him with the fierceness of the dove.

Poor Miss Faith! she was trying to work herself up into anger against her friendly tormentor, but somehow the anger failed to come.

'Have I no right? are you sure of that?' he demanded gravely. 'You know better than I, Miss Faith; you must question your own heart and memory on that point.'

'What do you mean?' she asked, growing suddenly pale, but walking still faster; but he put out his hand and stopped her.

'What do I mean? Have you forgotten Carlisle? It is ten years ago, and we have both grown older since then; but I fancy we have neither of us forgotten. Do you like me as well as you did then, Miss Faith? Do you think you could make up your mind to exchange the Evergreens for Juniper Lodge?'

Faith gave a startled glance into his face, but what she saw there left her in no doubt of his meaning. It was as though an electric shock had passed through her. She had been accusing him in her own mind of fickleness and forgetfulness, and all the time he had meant this!

'I thought that it was you who did not care, who had forgotten,' she gasped, not answering his very plain question in her first dizziness of surprise.

'Then you thought wrong,' he returned coolly. 'Women are not the only faithful beings in creation, so you need not lay claim to that extra virtue. It was you who left me, remember that, Miss Faith.'

'But you might have followed; you might have asked what had become of me,' she faltered.

'What was the use?' was the uncompromising answer.
'I had a mother and sister to maintain. A wife is too expensive a luxury for a poor man, and I was poor enough, in all conscience. Well, so it is settled, and we understand each other at last, Faith?'

'Yes, I suppose so,' she returned softly.

The wooing had been brief and matter of fact on Dr. Stewart's side; but apparently he was quite satisfied with the result, for he walked on in a brisk, contented sort of way.

Faith walked beside him, dizzy, and with her head throbbing with nervous pain. She had forgotten all about her old brown hat and her waterproof. The low, grey skies still foreboded rain, and the wet pools shone under her feet; but if a miracle had transformed them into rosy wine she would scarcely have been more astonished. That he should have meant this all that time!

'And I thought you had forgotten, Dr. Stewart,' she said

presently, in the tone of one that craved forgiveness.

'Humph! you will find Angus more to your purpose,' he returned curtly. 'How about Miss Charity and the readings now, Faith,' with a merry twinkle.

'Caral oh, what shall we do with her?' she exclaimed, clasping her hands in sudden despair. 'It is I who have

forgotten now. My poor Cara!'

'Leave Cara to me,' was Dr. Stewart's only answer, as they turned their faces homeward.

### CHAPTER XXXIII

#### 'CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME'

'Beseech your Majesty,
Forbear sharp speeches to her; she's a lady
So tender of rebukes, that words are strokes,
And strokes death to her.'—SHAKESPEARE.

Kindness in women, not their beauteous looks, Shall win my love.'—SHAKESPEARE.

FAITH'S nervous trepidation returned in full force when they came in sight of the Evergreens. She cast a piteous glance at the bay-window and then at Dr. Stewart, which secretly moved him to inward laughter, though not a muscle of his face betrayed amusement.

'There are no white slaves in England, leave Miss Charity to me,' he said again, and the masculine assurance of his voice gave her a delicious sense of security.

The quiet way, too, in which he relieved her of her cloak in the hall, and bade her lay aside her hat, brought with it a strange new feeling of protection and care. There had been on his part no protestations, no vehement declaration of affection; but for a matter-of-fact, middle-aged wooer, rather new to his duties, Dr. Stewart was doing remarkably well.

Miss Charity was alone when they entered. The other sisters were in the habit of indulging in an afternoon nap, which they enjoyed in strict seclusion; but Miss Charity's bright eyes never closed till night, and not always then. The poor lady could have published many a volume of midnight

meditations, when she and pain held their dreary converse

together during those ten long years of suffering.

She looked up rather sharply over her knitting-needles as the two made their appearance. She was still put out at Faith's unusual manifestation of self-will, and an afternoon's

lonely cogitations had not sweetened her acerbity.

'So you have come back at last, Faith!' she remarked ironically; 'I hope you have enjoyed your wet walk. I wish you would cure Faith, Dr. Stewart, of her absurd restlessness and love of wandering; she goes out in all weathers, and that is such a ridiculous thing in a woman of her age. finished Charity, who, in certain moods, was given to remind her sister that she would never see thirty-five again.

But the taunt was lost for the first time on Faith, for had

she not received this afternoon a fresh lease of youth?

'What does it matter about age! we have had a beautiful walk,' returned Faith, laughing a little nervously as she hung over the back of her sister's sofa so that her face was hidden. The conjunction, so sweet to newly-engaged people, had slipped out by mistake. Miss Charity looked up testily.

'Who do you mean by we! I wish you would speak Has the doctor joined you in your hunt after dripping hedges! If one does not learn common sense when one has turned thirty-five last March I don't suppose it will ever be learned, grumbled the invalid, who, with all her

sharpness, had not an idea of the real state of the case.

Dr. Stewart's eyes began to twinkle wickedly; he was enjoying the fun. Miss Charity's moods always amused him. He generally let her fret and fume to her heart's content without attempting to contradict her, but a glance at Faith's nervous face determined him to give her a 'clincher.' as he called it.

'Yes; I met Faith, and we had a walk together,' he commenced blandly, but Miss Charity began to bridle.

'You met my sister, Dr. Stewart. I suppose you did not mean-to say what you did?' she was about to finish, but the doctor interrupted her cheerfully.

'Well. I call her Faith because we are old friends, and because we have settled our little matters between ourselves this afternoon. When two people have decided to become man and wife there is no further need for formality, eh, Miss Charity.'

'Man and wife!' responded Miss Charity with a faint shriek, and then she covered her face with her hands.

'Yes; have we startled you?' he continued more gravely, for her surprise and agitation were very great. 'Faith was unprepared for my speaking, or she would have given you a hint. It seems we have cared for each other, in a sort of a way, for the last ten or eleven years; there's constancy for you! Why, I have been all over the world, and have yet come back to my old sweetheart.'

'Where are you, Faith? Why do you let Dr. Stewart do all the talking?' demanded Miss Charity, uncovering her pale face, but speaking in her old irritable manner. 'If you have accepted him, and you are going to be what he said,' shivering slightly, for the words brought back a dreary past and void of her own, 'there is nothing for me or any one to say. You're not a girl,' with an hysterical laugh; 'I suppose you know your own mind.'

Oh, Cara!' cried poor Faith, with tears in her eyes, 'I don't know how I can be so selfish as to wish to leave you, but it is all true that he says. It was coming back to nurse you that put a stop to everything ten years ago; and now he has come back, and it seems as though we were meant for each other, and—and—' here she broke into nervous

sobbing.

'Pooh, pooh,' returned the doctor, but his eyes glistened a little in sympathy; 'Juniper Lodge is only next door, you are not going to be separated. Come, Miss Charity, you are a kind soul, and have courage enough for ten Faiths, say something comforting to your sister, to give her a good heart over this.'

Dr. Stewart knew how to treat Miss Charity. Underneath the sharpness and irritability there was the true metal of a good womanly nature, and a courage few women could boast. Years ago she had fought out her own battle, and had laid herself down on her bed of pain with a breaking heart but unmurmuring lips. Had she ever forgotten poor George since the day she had given him up? had she ever believed the stories they had brought her of his unworthiness?

The small world of Hepshaw only saw in Miss Charity a little bright-eyed woman, with a caustic tongue and a temper soured by disappointment and suffering; but no one but Faith, and perhaps Dr. Stewart, knew what the martyred body and nerves bore day and night.

'I feel sometimes like St. Lawrence on his gridiron; I wish it were a bed of roses to me too,' she said once grimly to her sister; but not even to her did she speak of the slow agonies that consumed her. What would be the use, she thought; pain is sent to be borne, not to be talked about.

Neither to Faith did she speak of the strange thoughts and dreams that haunted her nights. Sometimes, half lulled by opiates, it would seem to her as though the walls and roof of her chamber were thrown down; through the room rushed the cold winds of heaven; above her was the dark midnight sky seamed with glittering stars. How they wavered and shone! Voices sounded through them sometimes. Grey and white shadows moved hither and thither, silent, but with grave, speaking eyes pitying and full of love. 'Poor Charity!' they seemed to say, 'still fastened to the cross and waiting for the angel of peace and rest. Will he be long?' And the echo seemed to be caught up and passed on shudderingly: 'Will he be long?'

Ah, yes; those were her parents! and poor George, how plainly she could see him! He had died a drunkard's death they had told her, with a sorry attempt at comfort. He had ridden after a night's debauch, and his seat and hand had been unsteady; but she had shaken her head incredulously. What mattered how he died! he was at rest, she knew that, she was sure of it; he could not have sinned as they said he had—her poor George, on whom she had brought such misery!

And now, because her cup was not yet full, this further sacrifice was demanded of her. She must give up Faith, the patient nurse and companion of all these years of suffering. True, she was often cross and irritable, but could any one be to her what Faith was? could any one replace that soft voice and gentle hand that had lulled and made bearable many an hour when the pain threatened to be intolerable? would any other bear her cross moods with such patience

and loving resignation? The thought of this new deprivation paled the poor invalid's cheek and swelled in her throat as Dr. Stewart uttered his persuasive protest.

'O, Cara! I shall never have the heart to leave you when it comes to the point,' cried Faith, clinging to her with fresh tears. What did it matter that they were not young women, and that Cara's hair, at least, was streaked with grev, and that Dr. Stewart was regarding them with eyes that alternately twinkled and glistened. Had they not their feelings? was not Cara her own sister? 'O. Cara! I never shall be able to leave you!'

'Nonsense,' returned Miss Charity, pushing her away, but with tears in her eyes too. 'Get up, Faith, do; what will Dr. Stewart think of us? Of course you must have him if you want him; and a good husband at your age is not to be despised, let me tell you that.'

'But what will you do without me ? and Hope reads so. badly,' sighed her sister.

Miss Charity winced a little over the idea, but she re-

turned bravely—

'Oh, I shall get along somehow; Hope is not so bad if you put cotton wool in one ear; and she always knows what she is reading,' with an accent of reproach to denote Faith's wandering attention. 'There, there, it is all right,' patting her shoulder kindly. 'Juniper Lodge is not a hundred miles off, and I daresay Dr. Stewart will often spare you to us; and all I have to say to him is, that a good sister will make a good wife, and that he will soon find out for himself;' and with that Miss Charity composed herself to her knitting again. and shortly after that Dr. Stewart took his leave.

'Must you go yet? I hoped you would have waited and seen Hope and Prudence, faltered Faith timidly, as she followed her lover into the little hall and watched him invest himself in his shaggy greatcoat; but Dr. Stewart

only smiled and shook his head.

'Not to-night; give my kind regards to them. To-morrow afternoon if it holds up we will have another walk together and discuss future arrangements. You will want this evening to get your thoughts in order, eh, Faith?' with a look of such thorough understanding and good-humour that her colour rose.

'Miss Charity is enough for one afternoon, I could not quite stand the other cardinal virtues,' he said to himself

as he sat down contentedly to his solitary tea.

Jean, excellent woman, knowing his ways, had lighted the fire and brought down his slippers to warm. 'I am not so badly off as a bachelor that I need be in such a hurry to change my state,' he went on, stretching out his feet to the blaze; 'but how is a man to enjoy comfort and the pleasure of a good conscience knowing that a human creature is dying by inches next door! and though that's rather strong, I do believe she gets thinner every day, with all that worry and reading nonsense. When she is my wife no one can interfere with her, and I can keep Miss Charity within bounds. Poor soul! one is bound to pity her too. I felt quite softhearted myself when Faith was kneeling there looking so pitiful. Well, she is a dear woman, and I don't repent of what I have done; for, in spite of Jean's excellent management, one feels a trifle dull sometimes now the old mother's gone and Edie is married. By the bye, I must write and tell Edie about this, she will be so delighted.'

Faith returned a little soberly to the parlour when Dr. Stewart had taken his departure. She would gladly have slipped away to her own room to dream over this wonderful thing that had happened, but she knew that would have been an offence in her sisters' eyes. There were Hope and Prudence to be enlightened, and a gauntlet of sisterly criticism to be run. Dr. Stewart was such a favourite with them all, that she knew that in whatever light they might regard her acceptance of his offer that it would not be unfavourable.

Miss Charity broke the ice herself in her usual trenchant fashion.

'A fine bit of news I've got for you two while you have been napping,' she began, knitting in an excited manner. 'Here's Faith, who is old enough to know better, has gone and made a match of it with Dr. Stewart.'

'What!' ejaculated Miss Hope, and then she broke into one of her loud hearty laughs that always jarred on the invalid's nerves. 'Well done, Faith; so you don't mean to be an old maid like the rest of us. Well, three in a family is enough to my mind, and plenty, and you never had quite

the proper cut. So it is mistress of Juniper Lodge you mean to be! Well, well, this is a rare piece of news to be sure; nothing has happened in the family worth mentioning since Charity took up with poor George.'

'Well, there will be one mouth less to feed,' put in Prudence in her usual strong fashion; 'and with the present exorbitant price of meat that's something for which to be thankful.'

But though the speech was not sympathetic Miss Prudence's lean brown hand trembled a little as she unlocked the tea-caddy and measured out the scanty modicum of tea. Poor Miss Prudence! there was still a warm woman's heart beating under the harsh, unloving exterior, though it seldom found utterance. Her one object in life had been to eke out a narrow income, and bring down her own and her sisters' wants to the limits of penury. A small saving constituted her chief joy; the low standard had dwarfed her moral stature; petty cares had narrowed and contracted her; the mote in her eye hindered the incoming of heart sunshine, and made her life a hard, unlovely thing.

For it is a sad truth and a painful one to many of us, that in a great measure we form our own lives. The wide blanks, the vacuum that nature abhors, are all self-created. Outside the void, the chaos, the central abyss of self, there wait all manner of patient duties, joys, griefs, possible sufferings, a world of human beings to be loved, to replenish emptiness and the waste of spent passion.

Miss Prudence was one of those unhappy beings who read the meanings of life by the light of a farthing dip. Within her secret sanctuary the small god Economy dwelt as a favoured deity. She would sweep her house like the woman in the parable for the smallest possible missing coin, and go to bed in despair for the loss of it; but she left her own inner chambers miserably unclean and full of dust and cobwebs.

And yet, as in many other persons, Miss Prudence's faults were only caricatures of virtues. She was miserly, but it was for her sisters' sakes more than for her own. To keep the little house bright and respectable she toiled from morning till night; but I do not know that any of them loved her better for it. It was Prue's vocation, her one taste. If she

could only have read to Miss Charity, and taken her share in the nursing, Faith would have been more grateful to her.

She fretted, as was natural, over that little speech of Miss Prudence's, for she was faint with excessive happiness, and thirsted for a pure draught of sisterly sympathy.

'Is that all you have to say to me, Prue?' she demanded

in an injured tone.

'What have I got to say,' returned poor Miss Prudence, looking greyer and grimmer, 'except that it is a fine thing to be Dr. Stewart's wife and the mistress of Juniper Lodge, and not be obliged to count your pence till your eyes ache with trying to make out that five are equal to six? That's what I've been doing all my life, Faith, and no thanks to me either; and it does not always agree with one.'

'There, there, take your tea, Faith,' interrupted Miss Charity testily; we've wasted more than an hour already over this business of yours, and we shall get through very

little reading to-night.'

'Nonsense, Charity; let Faith have her talk out,' observed Hope, in her good-humoured way. 'We don't have weddings every day in the family, and it is hard if we don't make much of them when they come. Well, and is the day fixed, Faith?'

'No, indeed! What are you thinking about?' returned

Faith, quite terrified at the idea.

She sat at the tea-table a little sad and confused as Miss Hope plied her with good-natured jokes and questions. Why did not Cara want her to talk? why was Prudence so snapping and hard? and why could they not all leave her alone with her thoughts?

'I think I will read now,' she said, taking up the book

and sinking with a sigh into her usual seat.

As the soft harmonious voice made itself heard Miss Charity's eyes filled with tears and her forehead contracted as though with pain. 'And she must lose this her one consolation,' she thought. Faith's reading was to her as David's harp to the sick soul of Saul—it drove away the evil spirit of despondency. 'It is giving the widow's mite—all I have,' thought Miss Charity, with a little thrill of pathos.

As for Faith, she went through her allotted task with an outward semblance of patience and much inward rebellion,

reading mechanically, without perceiving the drift of the sense. 'And he meant this all the time,' she said to herself. 'Oh, how little I deserve him and my happiness.'

Faith's evening, on the whole, had been disappointing, but before many hours were over she found that things were not to be arranged to her liking. The moment it came to a clashing of wills she soon discovered that Dr. Stewart's was to be paramount.

Faith had certain old-fashioned views on the subject of courtship and matrimony. The one must not be too brief or the other too sudden in her opinion. Dr. Stewart's views

were in direct opposition.

'When a man gets on to middle age, and has knocked about the world as much as I have done,' he said to her the following afternoon as they again plodded through the miry roads, only now a pale uncertain sunshine followed them, 'he finds courtship just a trifle difficult. I am a plain man, and speak my mind plainly, Faith. We've known each other, or at least thought about each other, these ten years. We are neither of us young, and we are not likely to get younger; so if you're ready I'm more than willing, and we will just say the middle of November, and talk no more about it.'

'But, Angus, that is only just six weeks!' faltered his fiance.
'Yes, and that's a fortnight too much,' he returned bluntly.
'Shall we make it the end of October then?' at which alarming alternative Faith had only just strength to gasp out a faint negative, and subside into startled silence. After all,

was not this exchanging one sort of tyranny for another?

She made known the news of her engagement to her friends at Church-Stile House in a shame-faced manner that was quite new to her. Cathy fairly danced round her with delight, and even Langley's wan face brightened with sympathy.

'Dear Faith, I am so glad,' she whispered. 'Such con-

stancy deserves its reward.

'A wedding at Hepshaw, and one of the cardinal virtues, of all people!' crowed Cathy. 'What will the sisterhood do without you? in such a household, loss of Faith must be terrible,' finished the girl solemnly.

'It is dreadful for Cara. I lay awake half the night thinking what she would do without me. It does not matter so much for Hope and Prudence; they will miss me, of course, but then they have each other; but Cara!

'Oh, Miss Charity will do well enough!' returned Cathy in her offhand manner. You must not think of any one but Dr. Stewart now.'

'Of course I think of him; he—Angus—is so good; oh, you don't know how good he is to me. But all the same, six weeks, and he will not hear of waiting any longer; and now he has talked Cara round to his opinion, and she says the sooner the fuss is over the better!' finished Miss Faith, in a

tone between crying and laughing.

Poor bewildered Faith! she had taken refuge with her kind friends at Church-Stile House to seek the sympathy that was not forthcoming at home. Langley's womanly intuition soon guessed the real state of the case—that Faith was half afraid and half proud of her lover's rough-and-ready wooing. and needed quiet and soothing. She dismissed Cathy and her overpowering liveliness as soon as possible, took off Faith's bonnet, put her in the easy-chair in her own corner, and petted and made much of her all the evening. Before many hours were over Faith had made her little confession, feeling sure that Langley would understand her. It was not that she was not happy, but she was just a little bit disappointed. was very kind, just what he ought to be; but he seemed to take everything as understood, and that there was no need to say nice things to her. Why he had been far more lover-like ten years ago, when he had never said a word to her. 'But all that he and Cara think about is to have it over quickly and without fuss. One ought not to call sacred things by that name,' concluded Faith, with tears in her eyes.

'Dear Faith, men are so different to us!' returned her friend gently. 'I quite understand how you feel; but then Dr. Stewart thinks he has given you an all-sufficient proof of his affection beyond any need of words. You are not going to marry a demonstrative man, you must remember that; but I don't doubt for one moment that he means to make you a

happy wonan.'

Things never come quite in the way one wants,' replied Faith with a little sigh; but she felt more than half comforted by Langley's sympathy and wise common sense. When Dr.

Stewart came in to fetch her by and by she had regained her old serenity of manner.

As for Dr. Stewart, after a few minutes' quiet observation of him Langley was quite satisfied to trust her friend's happiness in his keeping. There was a watchful tenderness in his bearing towards her, a quiet unobtrusiveness of attention, that spoke for itself without need of words. Faith would soon find out for herself that she was warmly loved and cherished, though it might not occur to him to tell her so.

He gave Langley a hint too of his reasons for hurrying on

the preparations for the wedding.

'She is almost worn out now, and the sooner some one takes care of her the better,' he said, in his straightforward, sensible way, when Faith had gone upstairs to put on her bonnet. 'She has been taking care of people the best part of her life, and now she wants rest and a little comfort. Miss Charity is a good woman, but she is awfully trying at times; but she will have to ask my leave before she tyrannises over my wife.'

'You have got a treasure, Dr. Stewart; you don't know how much we all think of Faith, and how dearly we love her.

Garth says she is the best woman he knows.'

'I always knew she was a good creature,' returned Dr. Stewart in a provokingly matter-of-fact tone; but the gleam in his eyes contradicted it, and Langley understood him, andwas satisfied.

The six weeks' courtship was soon over, but not until Faith was nearly harassed to death by the multiplicity of her labours. The slender resources of the sisters could only furnish a very modest outfit for the bride. The wedding dress, a soft grey silk sateen, was Langley's gift, and the rich black silk and handsome sealskin jacket, that were the glories of the whole, were anonymous presents directed to Faith Palmer in an unknown hand.

Faith believed that she was indebted for them to her lover's generosity, until he assured her very seriously that such an idea had never entered his head.

'No, no, Faith; I am not a poor man now, but I am not as rich as Crossus,' he returned, shaking his head over the rich roll of silk.

'Why, that must have cost seven and sixpence a yard if it cost a penny, and the sealskin is worth eighteen or twenty guineas!' exclaimed Miss Prudence, eyeing Faith with profound astonishment not unmixed with respect. The future Mrs. Stewart was evidently a very different person to the oft-snubbed younger sister.

'How I do long to know who sent them!' sighed Faith, bending over the parcels with a flushed face, which recalled

the Faith of old to Dr. Stewart's eyes.

Queenie, who happened to be at the Evergreens, laughed

over the fervency of the wish.

'What does it matter? the donor does not want to be thanked evidently. If I were you I should rather enjoy the mystery. People's thanks always seem like payment to me; they are delivered so punctually and with such effort.'

'All the same, I should like to know who has taken such kind interest in me,' returned Miss Faith, with a puzzled

expression as she fingered the sealskin.

This anonymous wedding gift was the only little bit of romance about the whole business. Faith sat and sewed with her sisters day after day, listening to long lectures on economy from Prudence, or read her allotted task to Charity. She did not dare to omit this duty even the day before the wedding. Dr. Stewart came in towards evening and found her pale and half hysterical over Carlyle's French Revolution.

'I think we need one too,' he muttered, as he removed the book from her hand. 'No more reading to-night, Miss Charity. What do you say to a game of chess with me?' and Faith

gave him a grateful glance and darted from the room.

It was a simple, unpretending wedding. Faith looked very demure and sweet in her soft grey dress and pretty bonnet. Dr. Stewart paid her the first compliment she had received from him.

'We shall have the old Faith back by and by,' he said to her. 'I mean to give you a week of sea breezes, and then we will settle down into regular Darby and Joan ways, shall we, my wife?'

And Faith blushed and said, 'Yes.'

And it could not be denied that Mrs. Stewart was a far happier woman than Faith Palmer had been. Langley and Cathy were amused at the brisk, matronly airs that soon replaced the soft melancholy that had been Faith's habitual manner. Angus was evidently perfection in his wife's eyes; his opinions were the soundest, his views never to be controverted, or his word questioned.

'Are you happy, Faith?' Langley asked her very tenderly

when they first met after her marriage.

'I am the happiest woman in the world; and Angus is everything that he can be,' returned the mistress of Juniper Lodge. 'Do you know, he won't hear of our neglecting Cara.' I read to her every day for an hour, and he often goes in and plays a game of chess with her; and he has taught Hope bezique and cribbage, and they play them together. Ah, you don't know how dear and thoughtful he is for them as well as for me!' finished Faith, with a look of infinite contentment.

### CHAPTER XXXIV

### THE SWING OF THE PENDULUM

'A woman is more considerate in affairs of love than a man, because love is more the study and business of her life.'—WASHINGTON INVING.

IT was about this time that Garth began to feel very uncomfortable. Hitherto his quiet, well-assured life, with its eight and twenty years of healthful work and activity, its moderate aims and small ambitions, had been singularly free from conflict. Mental disturbance, the weariness of selfargument, the harass of stormy passions, had been wholly unknown to him. In his ordered existence the pains and penalties of a lover's martyrdom had not vexed him.

He was still angry with Dora, but his discomfort did not proceed wholly from his wrath; it lay rather in a concealed

foar that he was mistaken in his own feelings.

After all, was it Dora that he wanted? Was the friend-ship between them sufficient to warrant the assumption that they would be happy together in their lifelong union? Was not her lukewarmness, her procrastination, tolerably clear signs that she was, in reality, as heart-whole as he? Would it go hardly with either of them if that dust-shaking movement of his should be carried out?

There was no engagement; the tacit understanding between them did not even amount to a promise. Dora had rejected his first attempt to place things on a more satisfactory footing; in reality he was free as air. Why was her influence so strong over him then that he feared to break the yoke of his subservience, and so stood, as it were, on the comfortless borders of uncertainty, battling between two opinions?

Dora was still away at Brussels, but Mr. Cunningham had returned. From him Garth learnt that they had found the invalid in a far more precarious state than they had at first imagined. The fever had subsided, but had been followed by a serious attack on the lungs. It was impossible for her sister to leave her; and Mr. Cunningham feared that a winter in the south of France would be imperatively needed.

Dora wrote a short letter soon after to the same effect.

The sight of the well-known characters moved Garth to a certain impatience. Why had she written to him? how did she know that his anger was not still hot against her?

'It is grievous to see dear Flo's sufferings,' she wrote. 'She is such a patient creature, and does all she is told; but at one time we hardly dared to hope that she would be spared to us. Poor papa was quite in despair; and as for Beatrix, she has been no use at all, she quite upset us the first evening by the way she clung to us. It is sad to see a girl of her age so entirely without control. The doctor still looks very grave over darling Flo, and I fear we shall be condemned to a winter in the south of France; in that case I shall send Bee home to papa, for her crying and fretting only harass one. I daresay Langley will look after her a little for me.

'I little thought I was saying good-bye to you for such a long time. If you had known that, you would have been a little kinder, would you not? But I must not think of that. I am afraid I think of you all a great deal too much; the prospect of the long winter away from every one makes me dreadfully homesick. Write and tell me how dear papa looks, and how every one is, and all about yourself, and believe me always and ever your faithful friend, DORA.'

Garth's answer was very cool and matter-of-fact. It contained a full description of Miss Palmer's wedding, with lengthy messages to Beatrix and Florence, and a few formal words of condolence over her prolonged absence. 'It must be such a bore to be exiled against one's will,' wrote Garth; but he did not say one word about himself.

Dora heaved a little sigh of regret as she folded up the

letter. 'Poor fellow! he is still very angry with me,' she

thought to herself.

Garth took a long solitary walk when he had finished his epistle; it had taken him more than an hour to compose, and yet it had hardly filled one sheet of note-paper. He was heavy with discomfort, and yet a feeling of triumph was uppermost. 'She will see that I am not to be played with; that I regard myself as free, and mean to keep my freedom,' he said to himself, as he tramped through the country roads in the starlight.

It was the beginning of November, and there was a keen, frosty feeling in the air. The fields that bordered the road on either side looked black in the dim light; the trees were gaunt and grotesque, stretching out their unclothed limbs in the darkness; the grey stone walls seemed dim and unsubstantial. Garth walked on with long, even strides. The cold air, the exercise, stirred his young blood, and drove away

despondent fancies; in their place came pleasurable images,

faint, yet full of grace, making pulsation stronger within

When did the thought first occur to him? When and where? or was it a thought at all, or only a feeling or sentiment? A novel sensation not to be described, and certainly not to be analysed, had taken possession of him the very night after his interview with Dora, when, sore and angry, he had betaken himself to the cottage.

It was strange how that picture of the two sisters haunted him. Sometimes, when he woke up in the middle of the night, he recalled it vividly: the child curled up on the rocking-chair, the girl kneeling on the rug with the plate of cakes in her hand, the firelight shining on her round, dimpled arms and flushed face, and then her paleness, and the startled brightness of her eyes when she turned to him.

Had Dora ever grown pale at the sight of him? had she ever moved his better nature by such sweet, strong words as those that greeted his ear that night?

'What is it that men do not understand?' he had asked her

in his simple, straightforward way.

'The blessedness of giving,' she had answered him, without guile or hesitation, 'the privilege of being able to see and

love what is highest and best without hope or thought of return. Some women feel in that way.'

Good heavens! could she—was it a bare possibility that she could be speaking of herself? and though, a moment after, he repelled this thought with a blush of shame over the vanity of such a supposition, other words conspired to haunt him.

'Those who have sympathy here must have sympathy there,' she had gravely assured him, and her earnestness had moved him to excitement. What if this sympathy were between these two; between him, Garth Clayton, and the

young creature that he had befriended?

'Dolt, fool, idiot! that's what I've been for my pains,' growled Garth between his teeth, as he struck at a young sapling with his stick; 'as though one could map and trace out one's feeling and one's life in that way. What is Dora to me after all compared to this girl, this stranger, whom I did not know six months ago; and yet, like a blockhead, I must try to bind myself to her, and call her my Fate.' And then he softened and grew pitiful. 'Poor Dora! poor dear Dora!' he said, with a kindly memory of his old playmate, and all his anger died out of him.

After all, there was a very true friendship between them, none the less that he did not deceive himself, and called it

by its right name.

Garth meant to go home straight that night, like the good young man he was; but, somehow, before he was aware he had unlatched the little gate. Perhaps it was the sound of Langley's voice in the porch that determined him. Of course it was the duty of an affectionate brother to escort her home.

But Langley had only left her own warm fireside to visit an ailing child in the village, and was carrying the report to

the young schoolmistress.

She still wore her Sister-of-mercy's grey cloak, as Cathy called it, which Queenie was half coaxingly, half playfully trying to unfasten. She started at Langley's surprised exclamation, and again that paleness was perceptible.

As for Garth, he flushed a little over the girl's evident

surprise.

'I heard your voice, Langley and so I followed you in,'

he said gravely, looking at her and not at Queenie. All at once he seemed embarrassed and ill at ease, his usual assurance had left him.

'Now you have come you must both stay,' replied Queenie brightly; she had recovered from her momentary agitation. 'Langley has brought me a very sad account of poor little Bessie. I must go down there the first thing in the morning.'

'Where is Emmie?' asked Garth, looking longingly at the empty rocking-chair, but not daring to take possession.

Langley's cloak still hung round her in long straight folds; she stood quietly warming herself by the fire, looking down

on the flame with a thoughtful, intent face.

'Emmie is tired and has gone to bed. Do you know,' looking up at Garth rather sorrowfully, 'that I am afraid that she is not as strong as she ought to be. I have been telling Langley so. I often find her lying on the rug in the twilight, and yet she will have it she is only tired.'

'She is growing so fast; children are often languid at that age; you must not be over-anxious,' he returned kindly.

'How can I help it? she is all I have,' replied the girl, turning from him to hide the tears in her eyes.

The kindness of his tone had brought them there.

Garth looked after her wistfully, but he said no more.

'Come, Garth, it is late, and we must not stay,' exclaimed Langley, rousing herself. She put her hand on his arm and drew him gently on without seeming to notice his reluctance.

Queenie stood in the porch and watched them till they

were out of sight.

'How kind he is to-night—kinder than usual,' she thought,

as she fastened up the door and went in.

The brother and sister were somewhat silent as they walked up the lane; Langley was taking counsel with herself. When Garth entered his study she followed him, somewhat to his surprise.

Are you very busy to-night?' she said, pausing by the

table, on which lay several letters, Dora's amongst them.

'Not too busy to talk to you, if that is what you mean,' returned Garth pleasantly.

If the truth must be known, he would rather have had his

study to himself to-night, but selfishness was not one of Garth's faults; perhaps Langley needed his advice, so he stirred up the fire, drew the easy-chair towards it, and then relieved his sister of her heavy cloak.

'We have none of us heard from Brussels but you,' she observed absently, as she perused the envelope before her. 'Garth, I hope you will not be vexed with me, but I think, as things are between you and Dora, that you ought not to go so much to the cottage.'

Garth nearly dropped the poker. 'Et tu, Brute!' he groaned. 'Is that what you have to say to me to-night, Langley!' he asked in a constrained voice, and Langley knew the matter of her speech displeased him.

'You must not be hurt with me, my dear, if I say what I think,' she returned, following him to the rug. 'You are such a good, kind creature, that it would never occur to you that your kindness could hurt any one; but Miss Marriott's position amongst us is somewhat peculiar.'

'I thought she was Cathy's friend,' he responded a little crossly.

'Yes; and mine too, and yours, if you care to call her so. You are only a young man, Garth, though you are so steady and reliable, and she is young and very attractive, and temptation comes when we least expect it; and a friendship is not always a safe and a wise thing; and—and I have long wanted to speak about this, my dear,' went on Langley in a motherly tone. True, Garth was only four years younger, but was she not older by years of suffering? could any sister love him better than she?

'There are some things that need not be discussed between us,' he returned, with a little dignity. 'I am quite aware of Miss Marriott's position.'

'Yes; but a sister is such a safe confidante,' she responded softly, not repelled by his loftiness. 'You and I have always been such friends, Garth, and I cannot bear you to be so close. I know you would not do anything that is wrong; but, as things are between you and Dora, I cannot but think these constant visits to the cottage are a mistake. If you knew how long I have wanted to say this to you, ever since—' But here Langley hesitated; she dared not hint that her uneasiness was chiefly caused by Queenie herself.

With her warm affection and clearsightedness she had arrived at the conviction that this constant intercourse was fraught with danger to the girl in whom they were so much interested. It was for her sake as well as Garth's that she was speaking now.

'Stop a moment, Langley,' exclaimed her brother angrily.
'You have twice made an observation; have I ever informed you that I was on the eve of an engagement with Dora?'

'I thought it was understood between you. I am quite sure Dora feels that she belongs to you,' was the serious reply.

'Then I beg to differ from you; Miss Cunningham feels nothing of the sort,' was the indignant retort. 'As far as I know, and I suppose I am the best authority in the matter, things are at an end between us. It is quite true,' flushing at the remembrance, 'that when I last went to the Vicarage I tried to put matters on a different footing. I had made up my mind that I owed Dora a duty, and I thought then that I wished this thing; but it appears I made a mistake. Miss Cunningham' (somewhat bitterly) 'had no intention of meeting my views.'

'Garth, surely you are mistaken!' exclaimed his sister,

much startled.

'I am not mistaken, Langley,' in an offended voice. 'Miss Cunningham is neither ready nor willing to enter into any engagement; she made that perfectly clear to me. She puts her father and sisters first, and me last; but she will see that I am not one to be trifled with.'

'Do you mean to tell me that Dora refused you?' was the

incredulous question.

'Not exactly; at least she would not let it come to that point between us, but she made her meaning tolerably clear. I am to go on in this way until she pleases to consider herself unfettered; but I have waited long enough.'

'Did you tell her so?'

'Yes; I said that there must be no more backwardness on her part, no pretence of insuperable obstacles where none existed; that it must be yes or no between us; that, in point of fact, she must have me or lose me.'

'Did you say all this?'

'Yes; but not in so many words.'

'I think she has treated you badly, and deserved to be frightened; there are no very real obstacles, as you say. Beatrix is a dear good girl, and will soon be old enough to look after her father and the parish. I always knew Dora's chief fault was too great a love of power.'

'I shall be sorry to interfere with her prerogative as

mistress of Crossgill Vicarage,' he returned coldly.

'Now, Garth, that is hardly fair,' rejoined his sister, smiling affectionately in his face. 'Dora has behaved very badly, but she has not sinned past forgiveness; she has never cared for any one but you all her life. I think that ought to soften your resentment.'

'I daresay we shall always be good friends,' was the

indifferent reply.

'The very best of friends. Why, this is sheer nonsense, Garth; Dora would be miserable if she knew how she had hurt you. Take my advice, dear; sit down and write to her, she is lonely and unhappy, and full of anxiety about her sister. Tell her that you are serious in what you said to her; that you are not patient, and do not mean to be; that she must make up her mind to give you a decided answer, and see what she says. Do you think she would run the risk of losing you altogether?'

'It does not matter, I shall not give her the chance of refusing me again,' he returned gloomily. 'Thank you for your advice, Langley, but it has come too late; I have made up my mind that Dora and I will be better friends apart.'

'You have made up your mind after all these years,' she said slowly and regretfully. 'Poor Dora! whom we all loved for your sake, and who is so good and faithful a sister and daughter, so thoroughly trustworthy and affectionate! Oh no, Garth, you could not be so fickle!'

'You speak as though I have been in love with her all these years,' returned Garth sullenly. 'You know very well, Langley, I have been perfectly heart-whole all the time. True, I always believed that we should come together, but it is not my fault if my inclinations no longer point that way.'

'Ah!' Langley uttered no more than that little monosyllable, but the blood rushed to her brother's face; she knew now what he meant. 'Poor Dora!' she sighed, and then she put up her face and kissed him, and said good-

night.

She had come to speak to him about Dora, not of the other one; that was none of her business. As far as she knew, his choice was not an unwise one; no one could know Queenie and not love her. She had grown into all their hearts strangely; but the old friend of their childhood, Dora!

She went away very sadly after that. Garth made no effort to detain her. His purposes were not yet ripe enough for confidence; he was a little shy of whispering them even to himself.

'You are not hurt with me because I ventured to say this to you?' she asked him, as she was about to move away.

'No; I think I am relieved; it is always best to undeceive people,' was his sole reply, and then she left him.

Garth enjoyed his solitude uninterruptedly after that, but he was not quite at ease in his own conscience. Langley's words, few and temperate as they were, had troubled him. It seemed so strange to hear her pleading Dora's cause, the very girl whom all these years he had intended to make his wife.

Should he give her this one chance more? should he write such a letter that its very sternness should constrain her to answer him? but no, she might repent and fling herself into his arms, and now his heart had gone from her.

'It is well to be off with the old love before one is on with the new,' thought Garth, somewhat ruefully, for it was very clear that it was not Dora now that he wanted. 'We are better apart; she will get to see that in time herself,' he said, as Langley's earnest pleading rose uncomfortably to his mind. 'I don't believe she is a bit in love with me.' And before he retired that night he made up his mind that things must take their chance. He would wait a little perhaps, there was no hurry. When the time for his wooing should come he would carry it in far different fashion than he had done, and the girl he should woo would not be Dora.

## CHAPTER XXXV

### CHANGES AND CHANCES

One half our cares and woes
Exist but in our thoughts;
And lightly fall the rest on those
Who with them wrestle not.
The feather scarcely feels the gale
Which bursts the seaman's strongest sail.

C. WESLEY.

THINGS went on tranquilly for the next few days. Garth looked a little shame-faced when he next saw his sister, but he knew her too well to fear that an unready confidence would be solicited. Langley never asked to know people's secrets. If they reposed them in her they found her trustworthy and sympathising. She had eased her conscience by warning her brother, and now that her duty was discharged her heart was full of forebodings for their old friend Dora; and a feeling that was almost akin to disappointment troubled her when she thought of Garth's changed fealty. 'Toujours fidele' had been her motto for him as well as for herself, and yet, of the two girls her heart clave more to Queenie. had no intention of reposing confidence in any one. He hid his feelings as well as he could, assuming at times an uneasy gravity that did not belong to him; but the usual symptoms were not lacking. He became enamoured of his own company, addicted to solitary walks and an overmuch use of meditation, was somewhat absent and desultory in his conversation, and haunted the lane with his cigar at all manner of unseemly hours. Queenie was not unmindful of this change in Garth.

It may be doubted whether women are ever entirely unconscious of even a hidden passion; trifles are significant in such cases. A certain subtle change in Garth's tone, a hesitation, nay, a reluctance in speaking her name, a swift unguarded look, brought a sweet conviction to her mind: Dora must be forgotten. A rosy flush of hope, bright as her own youth, dawned slowly upon her.

Queenie was sitting alone one evening, late in November, thinking over these things. It struck her with a little surprise that she had not seen her friends at Church-Stile House for two days; such a thing had never happened before. She and Emmie had spent the previous evening at Juniper Lodge; Cathy had been expected and had not made her appearance, and she had also omitted her usual afternoon visit at the cottage. A fleeting glimpse of Garth as he drove by in his dogcart was all that was vouchsafed her. Even Langley had been invisible. 'If it were not so late I would run up the lane and see what has become of them,' thought Queenie, with a slight feeling of uneasiness.

It was followed by a sensation of relief as the little gate unlatched and footsteps came up the gravel walk; but it was only Miss Cosie, with her grey shawl pinned over her curls,

and a voluminous mass of soft knitting in her hand.

'Dear Miss Cosie, to think of your coming out on such a bitter night! and I thought it was Cathy,' exclaimed Queenie, pouncing on the little woman with vehement hospitality, and

depositing her, smiling and breathless, in an easy-chair.

'There now, my dear, it was all Christopher's thought, at least he put it into my head,' began Miss Cosie, in her purring voice. 'There I was going on, purl two, knit two together, knit plain, and so on, and nothing but the wrong stitches coming uppermost; and Christopher, poor fellow, couldn't stand it any longer. "What's to do with you tonight, Charlotte?" he says. "I think the work has got into your head; hadn't you better leave it for Miss Marriott to put right?" for I just fussed him, you see, counting out loud and never getting any farther.'

'Do you mean that you could not get on with the new pattern I was teaching you the other night?'

'Well, my memory's treacherous, that's what it is,' re-

turned Miss Cosie, placidly regarding the pink and white tangle that Queenie was rectifying. "Charlotte, my love, your head is just a sieve, and your fingers are all thumbs," as my poor dear mother used to say when I took my work to her. Dear, dear, I can hear her say it now; but wasn't it clever of Christopher to pop the idea into my mind? "I will just run across to her, Kit, my dear," I replied, as pleased as possible, and he gave quite a comfortable sigh of relief.'

'Poor Mr. Logan!' laughed Queenie. 'You must learn to count to yourself, Miss Cosie; knit one and purl two is not a very pleasant running accompaniment to the leading article.'

'Bless you, dearie, Christopher was not reading!' responded the little woman with a sigh, 'he was just staring at the fire and groaning to himself in a quiet way. Though he has said very little about it he feels it terribly; he was as pale as a man could look when he came home and told me last night. "I feel it as much as though it had happened to myself, Charlotte," he said; and I believe, poor fellow, he meant it.'

'Dear Miss Cosie! what can you be talking about?' asked Queenie in a perplexed voice. 'Is there any trouble in

Hepshaw with which I am unacquainted?'

'There, there, you don't mean to say they have not told you?' replied Miss Cosie in an awe-stricken whisper, 'and such friends as you are too. Ill news fly apace, they say. Well, the righteous are taken away from the evil to come. His poor mother would have fretted her heart out to see him look as he does to-night, poor dear! and not a wink of sleep and scarce a mouthful of food since he first heard it, and that was yesterday morning, so Christopher says.'

'Dear Miss Cosie! won't you please tell me what you

mean?' begged Queenie beseechingly.

Miss Cosie was apt to become incoherent and rambling under any strong emotion, it would never do to hurry her into an explanation; but, all the same, these vague hints were filling her with dismay.

'I have not heard of anything: is—is there any trouble at Church-Stile House?' faltered the girl, growing a little pale over her words.

'Dear, dear! who would have thought of such a thing?

what could Catherine have been thinking about?' cried Miss Cosie, patting her curls nervously. 'Never mind, there, don't distress yourself, for there's good comes out of every kind of evil, so Christopher tells us; and very beautiful his sermons are, my dear, and very comforting to sick souls; and it showed great want of faith in me to burst out crying as I did. "Don't tell me that that poor young fellow has lost all his money, Kit, my dear!" I said, "for it breaks my heart to think of such a thing;" and Christopher said——'

'Well, what did Mr. Logan say?' asked Queenie as

calmly as she could, while Miss Cosie wiped her eyes.

A strange sickness of heart came over her. Could it be

Garth of whom she was speaking?

'Christopher said,' responded the little woman in a trembling voice, "I am afraid it is all true, Charlotte," he said; "there has been a run on the Bank, and things look as bad as they can look; and I shouldn't be surprised if that poor fellow has lost every shilling he has invested." That's what Kit said, my dear, and a great deal more that I did not take in.'

'Is it Mr. Clayton of whom you are speaking?' persisted

Queenie, in a set voice.

'Yes; that poor boy Garth. He and Christopher have been together all day looking into things. Christopher says he is as cool and quiet as possible, for all his haggard looks, only they can't get him to touch his food; and when a fine young man like that won't eat, it shows things have gone badly with him, as Christopher says.'

'I must go and see Langley,' exclaimed the girl, starting up. 'Dear Miss Cosie, please don't think me rude; but I cannot stay away from them now I know they are in trouble! It is not so very late, is it? but I could not sleep if I did

not see them to-night.'

'No, no; of course not, my dear. I should have felt the same in your case,' replied Miss Cosie placidly. She always agreed with every one, and would break off contentedly in an engrossing conversation at the slightest hint of weariness. 'If you have set my work right I will just go back to Christopher, for he is very down, poor dear, over all this, and will no more take his supper without me than a baby

would cut up its own food. There, there, my dear, I won't keep you,' as Queenie hovered near her in feverish impatience; and the girl accepted her dismissal thankfully.

She ran up the lane, regardless of the rain that beat down on her uncovered head. Her glossy hair was quite wet when she entered the warm room where Langley and Cathy were sitting together. Contrary to their usual custom, the sisters were quite unoccupied: Langley was lying back, as though wearied out, in her basket-chair; Cathy was sitting on the rug, staring into the fire. Both of them looked up with an exclamation of surprise when they saw Queenie.

'So late, and in this rain!' cried Langley, affectionately

passing her hand over the girl's wet hair as she spoke.

'What does it matter?—the rain I mean. I have only just heard; Miss Cosie has told me. Do you think I could sleep until I heard more? and Cathy has not been near me!' with a reproachful glance at her friend.

'You must not blame Cathy; she wanted to come to you to-night, only Garth and I would not let her. One ought not to be in a hurry to tell bad news; to-morrow would have been approach, applied Langley in her self-tried recipe

soon enough,' replied Langley in her soft, tired voice.

'Did not Mr. Clayton—did not your brother wish me to know?' stammered Queenie, somewhat nervously. Had she intruded herself where she was not wanted? would they think her officious, interfering?

Langley's calmness was baffling. Cathy, indeed, looked as if she had been crying, but she kept her face averted and did

not speak.

'I will go back if I am not wanted, if I am not to

know,' faltered the girl, growing red and confused.

'Nonsense, Queen! as though the whole world won't know it by to-morrow!' exclaimed Cathy sharply. 'Do you think it is a secret when people are ruined?'

'Oh, it is not as bad as that!' shrinking at the idea. 'Miss Cosie was so vague; she said he had lost money, that something had happened to the Bank; you know her way. It was impossible to understand; and then I said I must go to Langley.'

'Things are as bad as they can be,' replied Langley sorrowfully, while Cathy shivered a little. and drew closer to the fire. 'The shock has been so terrible for Garth; nothing could have been more sudden and unexpected. We were all as cheerful as possible yesterday morning, and then the letter came from Garth's solicitor; and when Garth went over to A--- to investigate the matter, it was all too true. There had been a panic and run on the local Bank; the thoroughfare was quite blocked up with people, farmers and tradespeople, wanting to draw out their money. Of course, with such a run there was only one result—the Bank broke, and all Garth's hard-earned savings are lost. It was between two and three thousand pounds that he had invested; not much of a fortune to some people, but a large sum for so young a man to put by. The worst is,' continued Langley, sighing, 'that Garth will blame himself for what has happened. Mr. Logan has always advised him to bank with a London house, and he had made up his mind to do so; but for some reason he has delayed the transfer of the money, and now it is too late; and he will have it that his procrastination has ruined us.'

Queenie pondered a little over Langley's account, and then

her face brightened.

'It is sad, very sad, of course, to lose so much money, but it is not absolute ruin; there is the quarry; your brother has

still got that.'

'But Garth only rents it. You see there is the rent to pay, and a royalty besides, and all the workmen's wages; and just now there is a dearth of orders, and the men are asking higher pay. And now all Garth's ready money is gone, and there is no one rich enough in Hepshaw to advance him the few hundreds that are necessary to carry on the works. We are trying to make the best of it, Cathy and I, for poor Ted is so utterly hopeless; but we do not see what is to be done.'

'Is there no one who could help you!' demanded Queenie in a low voice, but Cathy struck in impatiently—

'Do you think money is to be picked up in Hepshaw for the asking? There is not a friend we possess who could advance the loan, even if Garth would accept it. Captain Fawcett has only his pension and a small annuity, and Mr. Logan is as poor as a church-mouse, though I believe both he and Miss Cosie have expectations from some old aunt or other, who objects to die. We have not a relation in the world; never were there such distressed orphans,' continued Cathy, in a droll, disconsolate voice, that at another time would have made Queenie laugh.

'Cathy is right; I do not see who is to advance us the loan,' added her sister dejectedly. 'We do not quite understand the details, but Ted assures us that it is absolutely necessary that two or three hundred pounds should be forthcoming in the course of a week or two, or Garth will be compelled to throw up the whole concern.'

'Yes,' broke in Cathy; 'and when Ted said that, Garth turned round upon him quite angrily, and asked how he was to lay himself under such heavy obligations that he would never be able to repay. Then they had almost a quarrel over it. Poor Garth was so sore and unhappy; he says he has never owed a penny in his life to any man.

'How large a sum do you think would clear him?' asked Queenie casually, but two feverish spots burnt in her cheek.

'Ted said about six or seven hundred were required to put them on their feet again. There are some workmen's cottages Garth has been building, and the architect's bill is not paid. We have only Ted's word to rely on, for we cannot get Garth to open his lips to us. He just says in a resigned, hard sort of voice, that it is all up with us, and he and Ted must take situations; and then he looks at Langley and me and goes out of the room.'

His work is the best part of his life; he is so proud of his position,' put in Langley. 'Garth's nature is so proud and independent; he is so accustomed to be master of all his actions that he would feel dreadfully at being placed in a

subordinate position.'

'Why will you aggravate me by saying such dreadful things?' interrupted Cathy stormily, but the tears sprang to her eyes. 'I cannot think of Warstdale without Garth. Why. it would break his heart to give up the quarry.'

'Some one must lend him the money just to go on,' observed Queenie in a low voice. 'Surely there must be some . friend who will assist him in this matter.'

'We do not know where such a friend is to be found,' returned Cathy. 'One thing, I am determined to begin my hospital work without delay, and if things come to their worst Langley must go out as a companion. It seems hard breaking up the dear old home that we have lived in all our lives. Ted says if it ever comes to that Garth will never hold up his head again.'

'Ted seems a Job's comforter,' returned Queenie, but her eyes overflowed with sympathy, for the girl's voice was very sad. 'My poor dears, what am I to say to you! it is all

so sudden and dreadful.'

'Ah, that it is.'

'I don't see that it makes it any better to talk about it,' interrupted Cathy, springing up in a fit of nervous impatience. 'We are only making Queenie miserable, and it does no one any good. I am going to see if I cannot coax Garth to eat some supper. I shall tell him that it won't benefit the rest of the family for one member to starve himself.'

'Poor Cathy! she feels this terribly,' sighed Langley, as the door closed on her, 'but she will not let Garth see how much she takes it to heart. If it were not for Cathy and Ted I think I could bear this better, but it does seem so hard

if we cannot keep the home for them.'

'Langley, don't you think Mr. Chester could help your brother?'
Queenie was almost sorry that she spoke so abruptly when
she saw how the worn face flushed at the question. The

suggestion was evidently a painful one.

'Hush! if you knew how I have dreaded some one proposing this; but Garth will not; he respects me too much for that. Harry is very often embarrassed himself. Gertrude is so extravagant, and then there are such heavy doctor's bills; but if he knew of our difficulty I am sure he would sell his land rather than not help us. Oh, Queenie,' and here Langley's voice grew thin and husky with emotion, 'promise me that you will not hint at such a thing to any one.'

'Dear Langley, of course I will promise, if you wish it,'

shocked at the agitation she had caused.

'Yes; and you will go home now, and sleep quietly,' folding the girl's hand between her own. 'You must not take our troubles too much to heart. As Cathy says, that will do no one any good; perhaps in a few days we may see our way a little clearer.'

'I will go, if you wish it,' replied Queenie gently. And indeed what more could she find to say to this patient creature who was looking at her with such tired eyes? 'Dear, dear Langley, if you only knew how sorry I am for you all!' she said, kissing her, and then she went away.

But she was not able to leave the house unobserved; the door of Garth's study was open as she passed. As he caught sight of her, he came forward slowly and, as it seemed to

Queenie, a little reluctantly.

'I did not know you were here; what brings you out so late?' he asked with a little surprise, and then he mechanically stretched out his hand and took down his felt hat to accompany her down the lane.

'There is no need for that, it is not so very late,' returned Queenie hurriedly. 'I only came to see Langley, and—and

because I heard there was some trouble.'

Queenie hardly knew what she was saying in her confusion and nervousness; now they were face to face what could she find to say to him.

'All the same, that need not prevent my walking with you,' he returned quietly. He spoke in his ordinary manner, but Queenie noticed that his face was very pale and his eyes had dark lines under them; he had avoided looking at her too, and his hand when it touched hers had been cold and shook a little. 'It has left off raining, and the stars are coming out overhead, so there is no fear of your getting wet.'

'I am not afraid of getting wet,' she replied with a little nervous laugh. When they were outside the gate he slack-

ened his steps a little.

'So they have told you about everything?' he said in rather a forced tone.

'Yes; they have told me everything,' she returned simply, 'and, Mr. Clayton, I do not know what to say, except that I am more sorry than I can tell you.'

'I always knew we might count on your sympathy.'

'It seems such a dreadful thing to have happened, so utterly unexpected.'

'You may well say that. If an earthquake had yawned under my feet it could not have been a greater shock. I

thought myself so safe, in such absolute security, and now my foolhardiness has gone near to ruin us.'

'Ah, you must not say that.'

'Why must I not say it? A man must call himself names and speak badly of himself if he has proved himself an utter Have I not been a fool to procrastinate in the way I have done, and to neglect the advice given me?'

'No; you ought not to be so hard on yourself. worked all these years, and all your hard-earned savings are lost; every one must pity you for such a misfortune, there is

no room for blame, none.

'Ah, if I could only believe that. Do you know, my remorse for my carelessness has been such that I have scarcely eaten or slept since the news came. I cannot forgive myself for bringing all this trouble upon them.'

'Hush! this is worse than wrong; it is utterly morbid and wicked. Do not the wisest men in the world make mistakes sometimes? Could you know that the Bank was unsafe. and that there would be this run on it?'

'But all the same, I am reaping the fruits of my imprudence,' he returned, but his tone was a little less gloomy.

The knowledge of this girl's sympathy was very precious

to him. A little comfort dawned on him in his misery.

'It makes things so much worse when we blame ourselves,' 'It seems to me you want all your strength for actual endurance, from what Langley tells me. Your difficulties are very great.'

'I am ruined,' he returned in a choked voice. And then in a few brief sentences he recapitulated much that his sisters had told her, the absolute need of ready money for the architect's and builder's account, as well as for the rent and workmen's wages.

'Things have never been at such a low ebb with us before. We have executed fewer orders this year than any previous years. I had no business to speculate on those cottages. I don't see how matters are to go on at all. In a few weeks' time you will see my name on the bankruptcy list, and then there will be nothing but for Ted and me to look out for situations.'

'Oh, Mr. Clayton, I cannot bear to hear you talk so; something must turn up, some help must come,' repeated the girl earnestly.

Her face was flushed in the darkness, and her eyes full of tears, but he could not see that; perhaps he detected it in her

tone, for his changed instantly.

'But I have no right to bother you with all this wretched business, or to keep you out here in the cold,' for they were standing now by the little gate. 'Good-night, Miss Marriott. I know you are sorry for us, but we must not burthen other people with our troubles.'

But I like to be burthened. You must not treat me as a stranger,' she replied, putting her hand in his. 'If I do not say much about all this it is because I am so very sorry, and I do not know how to comfort you; but, all the same, I

believe something will turn up.'

'Let us hope so,' he returned, with a pretence at cheerfulress, and then he left her and went back to the house.

He had made no unmanly moan over his misfortunes, but his heart was sick within him as he thought of the future. He had lost his money and perhaps his home, and must he lose this sweet new hope that had come to him? If he were a poor man could he ever dare to trammel himself with a wife? and the thought of shutting out this new-found happiness was very bitter to him.

'There is enough to bear without thinking of that to-night,'
he said to himself, with a sort of shudder, as he shut himself
up in his solitary room; but, all the same, Queenie's soft
words haunted him with strange persistence.

He would have marvelled greatly if he could have heard what she whispered as he left her.

Oh, how ungrateful I have been, how utterly foolish. I can thank Heaven now that I have five thousand a year.'

# CHAPTER XXXVI

### THE TWO CONSPIRATORS

""Now look you!" said my brother, "you may talk
Till weary of the talk." I answer, "Ay,
There's reason in your words; and you may talk
Till I go on to say, This should be so." "—JEAN INGELOW.

'THANK Heaven, I have five thousand a year,' repeated Queenie, as she drew the rocking-chair to the hearth and sat down by her solitary fireside. 'For the first time I am really glad in my heart to be rich.'

Any unseen spectator would have marvelled what thoughts possessed this girl. Queenie's brow was knitted as though with perplexity, and yet a radiant smile hovered round her lips.

'It is difficult, far more difficult than I thought it at first,' she soliloquised. 'There is a complication that prevents me seeing my way clear, but if I sit here until morning I will find out what is the right thing to be done.'

'I wonder what Langley must have thought of me,' she went on. 'I must have seemed so cold and unsympathising. How could they know what kept me so silent? Why, it needed all my strength of mind to refrain from crying out, "I am rich; I can give you all, and more than you want; if you love me, let me share some of my good things with you." I wanted to fall on her neck and say some such words as these; but second thoughts are the best, and I knew I must be prudent.

'And then when he talked to me my secret seemed to choke me then. Oh, how my cheeks burnt in the darkness!

how I longed to say to him, "Do not be unhappy; there is no cause for despair. I have more than I know how to spend; let me be your creditor and advance you the sum you need. What are a few hundreds to me who have five thousand a year? Let me prove my friendship for you and yours by rendering you this trifling service." That is what I should have liked to have done, but I knew him too well. Would he have taken it from me? Alas, no! He would have turned round with that high manner of his and upbraided me for my foolish mystery. In spite of his wretchedness he would have taken me to task, and put things in such a light that he would have made me ashamed of myself, and then he would quietly refuse my offer. Would he accept this thing from the girl who a few months back was a stranger to him? No; a thousand times, no; but his embarrassment and discomfort would make him suspicious. He would be vexed with me for my silence, mortified by my importunity, and in his trouble I should be less to him than I am now.'

Queenie's secret predilection for Garth Clayton was making her timid. It had come to this, that nothing on earth could have induced her to offer him this money; she would have been as shame-faced and tongue-tied in his presence as a child just discovered in a fault. The silent understanding that was between them was too vague and unsatisfactory a basis for her to presume on; the word that was to give her the right and privilege of spoken sympathy had not yet been uttered, might never be. Mahomet's bridge is not more slender than this vague connection between two hearts that beat in sympathy and yet are asunder. Over the sacred abyss of silence hangs the invisible chain; it is strong enough to bear myriads of heavenly visitants, but only the eye of the faithful may discern it. To how many remain only the void and the mystery!

When a sensible person makes a mistake they are almost sure to repent it at some time or other. Queenie, who was as healthy-minded and straightforward as any pious, wellconducted young person could be, had yet fallen into the error of supposing that she might deviate into a bypath of romance and unreality without causing any great disturbance in her little world, while, in point of fact, she was only raising difficulties for herself. If she had gone to Garth Clayton and acknowledged the truth with all the eloquence of which she had been capable, he would have been charmed with her naiveté and frankness, and treated the whole matter as a girlish whim. Her perfect honesty would in time have reconciled him to her heiress-ship. True, it was highly probable that he might have rejected the loan, and given her plenty of trouble on that score. She might have had to experience the grief of seeing him refuse her aid and struggle on alone and single-handed; but such men as Garth Clayton rarely get their heads under water for long. He would have moved heaven and earth rather than this girl should help him. and in the end would have attained to some fair measure of success; and, while things were at this low obb with him. he would have vexed himself and her by imposing a barrier of reserve and coldness on himself. Queenic would have been made to suffer for those riches of hers. He would have pointedly assigned to her the place she must hold in the future—a friendship not too close or intimate. If the girl's faithfulness could have served this rough apprenticeship, and she could have meekly acceded to these hard conditions, his man's heart must have spoken at last, and broken down all barriers between them.

After all, there is nothing like truth, pure, straightforward truth, especially to men of Garth's calibre, who was a fee to all mystery, and disposed to treat such things somewhat harshly. But Queenie's feelish whim had ensured her, and there was no freeing her feel from the meshes. One thing was clear to her—Garth must have the money at once.

And so the young intrigues set her brains to work. How was she to put this sum in his hands! how could she negotiate the loan so that it could not full of acceptance? At first she proposed starting off to Carlier and needing Caleb hundinan's aid; she could twist Caleb round her hinde inger and make him it as she watted. Should she conseque a letter and get the following to copy it in his shake hardwriting! Only Finness knew those student fields characters and she was never likely to see the sense. What could see say and here Queene get a yeard and paper and strawfed a rough fruit.

igen au. in jeder if pear joud regau e taine monate

in your work. The reforms you have introduced among the quarrymen are not only known at Hepshaw, they have reached farther; and I have long wished to express to you the respect and sympathy I entertain for your labours.

'It is a good work, a noble work, and it would be grievous if anything were to hinder or frustrate it. I have heard with much regret of the failure of the A—— Bank, and the difficulties in which it has involved you. Such difficulties, of course, are only temporary, but still it is at such times that one requires a helping hand. I have more wealth than I need for my own use, and at present there are a few hundreds for which I am wanting a safe investment; permit me to take the liberty of an old friend and well-wisher, and to place these hundreds to your account, to be repaid in quarterly or half-yearly instalments, as you think best. The sum is between eight and nine hundred; and you will be doing me an immense service if you will make use of this money instead of letting it lie by idly.—I remain, sir, with profoundest respect and sympathy.

'AN UNKNOWN FRIEND AND WELL-WISHER.'

'P.S.—The instalments to be paid to Messrs. Withern and Smithers, Carlisle.'

'Will it do, I wonder?' asked Queenie with an anxious frown, as she laid down the document. 'I hope Caleb will think it sounds business-like. That part about the quarterly or half-yearly instalments was a very happy hit, I don't think Caleb could have done it better. I named Messrs. Withern and Smithers because Mr. Calcott had no dealings with them. The only thing I am afraid of is, that Caleb is getting so old and dazed that he may make a mess of the whole business; and then, on the other hand, will Mr. Clayton accept anonymous aid? will he not ferret it out somehow? Messrs. Withern and Smithers know Caleb by sight, all the leading firms in Carlisle do, and then it will be somehow traced to him. Mr. Clayton will leave no stone unturned; he always hunts mysteries to death, as he says. He will go over to Carlisle and set all manner of inquiries on foot, and he will work it round to Caleb, and then there will be an end to the whole business.'

'No; I am afraid I must adopt the other course, much as I dislike it. I must take Mr. Logan into my confidence, and make him my cat's-paw. I should not wonder if we both get terribly burnt in the end; but never mind, I must transpose Louis XIV's sayings for my own benefit, après nous le deluge. Once get the money in his hands, and the quarry in working order, and I must bear the brunt of the rest; he will not be so very angry with me when he knows—'But Queenie left the rest of the sentence unfinished.

And so it was that Mr. Logan got the following little

missive the next morning :-

'DEAR MR. LOGAN—I have something very important to say to you. Will you come round to me at five, if it will not greatly inconvenience you? Emmie will be out, and I shall take care to be alone; please say nothing about this to Miss Cosie.—Yours sincerely, QUEENIE MARRIOTT.'

Queenie had a great liking and respect for Mr. Logan. She came forward to meet him with a very frank blush when he entered the cottage the following afternoon. She was a trifle nervous at the task that lay before her, but her determination lent her courage.

She had seen Garth go past that morning looking ill and weary, as though from a sleepless night; and the memory of his pale harassed face was with her as she spoke.

'It is very good of you to come to me, Mr. Logan; I

think my note must have surprised you a little.'

'Well, well, perhaps it did,' he returned pleasantly, putting down his felt hat and placing himself near her. He had laid aside his spectacles, and his keen, near-sighted eyes beamed on her full of benevolence and kindness.

'That part, I mean, about not telling Miss Cosie that you were coming here,' she continued in her straightforward way. 'The fact is, I am in a difficulty, and want the advice and assistance'—laying stress on the latter word—'of a friend.'

'Then you were quite right to send for me; a vicar ought always to be at the beck and call of his flock, and to be ready for any temporal and spiritual emergency; the highest privilege we possess is the power of helping others. Now, supposing you tell me all about your difficulty; I am prepared to listen for any indefinite time,' with a bright, persuasive smile, for, in spite of her assumed courage, the girl's nervousness was not lost on him; and Queenic, nothing loath, plunged boldly into her subject.

'Of course I know you will respect my secret; but, all the same, I am afraid I shall shock you, for I have to acknowledge a little deception on my part. The fact is, Mr. Logan,' continued Queenie with the utmost frankness, 'I am not what I seem.'

This statement, to say the least of it, was slightly startling; for the moment Mr. Logan looked taken aback, but a glance at the bright ingenuous face before him seemed to reassure him.

'You have all of you thought me poor,' she went on, 'and so I was when I first came among you; but I am a rich woman now-I have five thousand a year,' opening her eyes wide at the mention of this surprising sum.

'My dear young lady, do you mean this?'

'Yes, indeed; and of course I knew how greatly I should surprise you. It is a droll idea, that the schoolmistress at Hepshaw should have five thousand a year, is it not? have hardly got used to the fact myself; and then, you see, even Emmie does not know. It was Emmie's uncle, Mr. Calcott, who left me all that money. But I know Cathy has told you all the particulars of that sad story; he could not leave it to Emmie, you see, and so it has all come to me; but I shall always feel as though it belongs most to her.'

'I must say I am extremely astonished!' Queenie looked a little mischievous at that.

'I congratulate you most heartily on your good fortune; but, all the same, I cannot understand your motives for secrecy. Here you have been for the last three months living in this cottage, and teaching in our village school, while all the time you might have been dwelling in ease and luxury.' And. with all his knowledge of human nature, Mr. Logan looked extremely perplexed.

'You must not be too hard on a girl's whim,' she replied, looking down.

'Oh, it was a whim then?' with a dawning perception of the truth.

'Yes, it was just that,' rather hastily. 'You see I did

not want the money, and it rather vexed me, coming in such quantities, and when everything was so nicely arranged. I had just been elected your schoolmistress, and the cottage was being furnished for us, and Emmie was so looking forward to it, and I had grown to like you all so; and it seemed so hard to give it all up, and go and live in a grand house in Carlisle, as Caleb wanted us to do. And so I thought,' with a little quiver of the lip she could not hide, 'that I would just put it all away for a little while, and be happy and enjoy ourselves; and by and by, when I had got tired of teaching, it would come out, and you would all laugh with me, and think it a good joke that Emmie and I had been living like disguised princesses.'

'Ah, well! it is a pretty piece of girlish romance,' smiling in spite of himself; 'but I must say I thought my school-mistress was a very different sort of person—far more staid and matter-of-fact.'

'And you are disappointed in her?' a little piteously, for Queenie had lately grown to distrust the wisdom of this freak of hers, and was sensitive in consequence.

'Nay, it is no such heinous offence; it is very venial and girlish;' but Queenie blushed hotly at his tone. She was afraid Mr. Logan thought her very romantic and silly, missish, in fact.

'I wanted to be liked for myself, and in spite of my poverty. It was not so very foolish,' defending herself some-

what plaintively.

'Well, well, perhaps not; we will not say any more about that,' he continued soothingly, for the girl's cheeks were burning under his implied reproof. 'One can carry out these sort of Quixotic schemes for a little while; but I should think by this time you have had enough teaching.'

'No! oh no!' she cried, greatly alarmed at this. 'I must go on for some time longer pretending to be poor, for months, perhaps a whole year. Emmie is so happy, and I am quite content. Mr. Logan, you will promise not to betray me?'

'But, my dear young lady, there can be no possible reason for this!'

'Ah, but there is a very important reason,' and now her manner changed and became grave and anxious. 'Don't you

know I must help Mr. Clayton? and there is no means of doing that unless I go on pretending to be poor.'

'And what good would that do him?'

'Why,' she returned, hesitating, 'you know him better than I do. If I were to go to him and tell him that I was rich, as I am telling you now, and offer to lend him money, he would put on his grand manner, and talk about independence, and make me feel ashamed of myself in a moment. Do you think he would take money from a girl, even in the shape of a loan? no; he would starve himself first, and bring them all to misery, and he would call his conduct manly and straightforward, and all sorts of fine names, instead of putting it down to pride and sheer obstinacy.'

'I must say I think you are right,' watching her somewhat anxiously, for a strange excitement seemed upon her. 'I think it very probable that he would refuse the loan.'

'Yes; and then Langley and Cathy will suffer, and who would help them, Mr. Logan? I have been thinking about this nearly all night, and there is only one way of making him accept the loan; you must offer it in your own name.'

He had been expecting this, for his manner testified no surprise; she had been leading up to this for the last ten minutes. Queenie's courage would have utterly failed if she had known how clearly those mild, near-sighted eyes were reading her. 'Why, it is the old story—a girl's first innocent romance.' he said to himself.

'I knew what you were going to say,' he returned aloud. 'This is a very clever scheme of yours, Miss Marriott; but how is it to be carried out? Garth Clayton is perfectly aware that I have no surplus money lying by. All Hepshaw knows that my living is hardly a rich one.'

'Why, I have thought of that too,' she went on excitedly. 'But we can easily get over that difficulty. I will place nine hundred pounds to your account,—that can be done in the next few days; I have only to write to Caleb Runciman,—and you must go to Mr. Clayton and tell him that that sum of money has just come into your possession; that it is lying at the Carlisle Bank. It will be no falsehood, for I shall have made it over to you, entirely and solely for their benefit. And then you must insist on his using it as he requires, and

paying you back in half-yearly instalments. You must be very careful and business-like in what you say to him,' she went on pointedly, 'for he is so proud that he will not touch the money unless he thinks he can repay it; and you can tell him that he can pay you interest on the money, or do just as he pleases, so that we get him to take it.'

'My dear child,' he returned, much startled, and not a little touched at her earnestness, and, indeed, the brown glow of Queenie's eyes was something pleasant to see, 'this is a generous project of yours, and I hardly know what to say

about it, except that I foresee many difficulties.'

'But what of that?' she pleaded; 'things are not always easy, we know. Surely you do not see any harm in my innocent little plot? There is nothing untrue in saying that you have this sum of money lying by, if I have given it into your own hands.'

'Well, perhaps not; but I should be afraid of blundering on my part. You see, we Hepshaw people are very simple and straightforward. We know each other's affairs almost to the lining of our purses. We have never dealt in romance and mystery as you have done, and I am bound to confess that the piece of diplomacy you have entrusted to me is far beyond my powers. The ruse is so transparent that Garth

would see through it in a moment.'

'Oh no,' she returned, clasping her hands; 'you must not fail me, Mr. Logan; everything depends on you. Why, she continued, with one of her quick bursts of eloquence, 'could you bear to see them leave Church-Stile House. with Langley and Cathy breaking their hearts for their old home, and Mr. Clayton looking ill and harassed and working himself to death, and all for the sake of a few miserable hundreds, for which I have no possible use, which, probably, I shall not need at all? What would it matter if he did find us out,' she went on boldly, but her words concealed a secret tremor, 'so that he gets out of his difficulties first? One of these days, not now, but a long time hence, when he has paid some of it back, you shall go to him and tell him the truth, and, though he will pretend to be angry, I know he will forgive us at last, and thank us for having saved him in spite of himself.'

Mr. Logan shook his head. 'I am not quite so sure about that. I think our deception would annoy him terribly.'

'Perhaps so; but after a time he will forget his annoyance. What does it matter if he be angry if we only do him good in spite of himself. It is the end for which we are working. We want to save him and Langley and Cathy from being ruined. It does not matter so much for Ted, who is young and a man, and must work for himself. It is Langley and Cathy one must help,' continued the girl a little artfully. 'I, for one, love them so dearly that I cannot bear to see them turned out of their old home, and made to feel how hard and bitter and cruel the world is, as Emmie and I have done.'

That moved him, as she knew it would, for he got up and paced restlessly about the room. The muscles of his face twitched under the influence of his emotion. Queenie watched him anxiously, but did not venture to disturb his reverie. After a silence of some minutes he came and stood before her.

'Well, Mr. Logan?'

'Well,' he returned, but very gravely, 'I suppose I must do as you wish; I can't find it in my heart to resist your eloquence, or to see such dear friends on the brink of ruin without stretching out a helping hand. As far as Charlotte and I am concerned, we would share our last crust with them, but what was the use of flinging our mite into the pit? I am not without hopes that I may be able to refund your money very soon, and to constitute myself their creditor, for, by all accounts, our poor old Aunt Prue is failing rapidly, and her death will make a tolerably rich man of me, that is to say, in a Hepshaw point of view.'

Queenie did not like this, but what could she do? she would be ashamed to hint at her reluctance. It pleased her to feel that the secret bounty was from her hand, that she was repaying in this way a little of her debt of gratitude and affection; but, after all, might it not be well that Aunt Prue's money and not hers should be used?

'It is this that makes me less reluctant to undertake the business,' he went on. 'In a few weeks or months I might myself be in possession of ample means, though one never knows how long an aged invalid may linger. Still, as Garth's needs are so pressing, I will try my best to induce him to accept the loan. I am only afraid of Charlotte or myself making some stupid blunder.'

'Miss Cosie!' exclaimed Queenie, very much startled.
'Oh, Mr. Logan, you do not think we need tell her!' for Miss Cosie's absence of mind and mistakes were even more proverbial in Hepshaw than her brother's; the amiable blunders she had committed during the course of her blame-

less existence were simply innumerable.

'Why, of course we must tell Charlotte,' with a smile at her evident discomfiture. 'Garth is sure to say something to her about the loan, or else Miss Clayton or Miss Catherine will do so, and she must not be left in ignorance. Charlotte manages all the business at the Vicarage, you know, and her first words would be sure to be, "Dear me, Christopher, we have not more than a hundred and fifty in the Bank; how can you lend Garth eight or nine hundred pounds?"'

'Yes, I see; it was very stupid of me not to think of that,' returned Queenie, but her heart sank within her. If Miss Cosie were admitted to their council she could not long

rely on secrecy.

'Ah, well, you have promised to carry this through for me,' she continued with a sigh; 'but do pray urge upon Miss Cosie to be very silent and discreet, a hint may spoil everything; at any rate you must not speak to her until the money has been offered to Mr. Clayton.'

'Oh no, I will guarantee as much as that. I am almost as anxious as you are in this matter.' And then, after a few

more words, he got up and took his leave.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

## 'YOU KNOW THIS IS A GREAT SECRET'

"And had he friends?" "One friend perhaps," said he,
"And for the rest, I pray you let it be." —JEAN INGELOW.

QUEENIE was terribly restless during the next few days. While the important negotiation was impending she held aloof as much as possible from her friends at Church-Stile House. She could scarcely look Garth in the face when she met him in the village, so heavily did her secret weigh upon her. She had been once to see Langley, and had sat with her some time; but their talk had languished, and at last degenerated into silence. Langley had been too sad and heavy-hearted to make any pretence of cheerfulness, and Queenie had been so oppressed with secret consciousness that she had failed in outward manifestations of sympathy.

'If talk would only mend matters you would have no reason to complain of my silence,' Langley said, by way of excuse for her downheartedness, when Queenie rose to take leave.

'One cannot always talk; I wish I were only as patient as you,' had been Queenie's reply. But she breathed more freely when she had crossed the little bridge and was walking down the lane in the grey, waning light.

But Cathy came to the cottage, and was so low-spirited, and drew such dismal pictures of the future, that Emmie, who was weakly and tender-hearted, burst out crying, and for a long time refused to be comforted.

'Oh, Queen, if we were but rich!' sobbed the poor child,

'how nice it would be to help them. I can't bear to think of Langley and Cathy working as you used to work at Granite Lodge, and being hungry and cold and miserable. Cathy

might come and live here, there is plenty of room.'

'Yes, yes, my sweet,' returned Cathy, drying her eyes and kissing her hurriedly, 'I will promise to come to you if I am starving; but I am going to nurse the sick people in St. Thomas's Hospital, you know, and nurses are sure to get plenty to eat,' and the warm-hearted girl changed the subject, and began a ludicrous narration of Ted's sayings and doings during the last few days.

But Emmie could not forget her friends' troubles; she brooded over them silently, and at last made a little

pilgrimage on her own account.

Garth, sitting moody and listless in his study, was surprised by a feeble tap, and then by the entrance of the child in her little scarlet hood.

'Why, Emmie, my dear,' he said kindly, 'has your sister brought you over to see us? surely you have not come alone

this cold evening.'

'Queenie and Cathy are talking so busily that they will not miss me; they think I am with Patience. I did not mind the cold a bit; I came all by myself, because I wanted

to see you, Mr. Garth.'

'To see me!' in a surprised tone, for, in spite of their friendship, Emmie had never before distinguished him in this way; her visits had always been to Langley. 'Well, I am highly honoured, and must make much of my visitor. Will this thing untie?' touching the red hood. But Emmie took no notice of his question; she stood beside him with her large blue eyes fixed gravely on his face, and then she put up her hand and stroked his cheek, but very gently and timidly.

'Poor Mr. Garth, I am so sorry for you.'

'Why, my dear?' But he was touched in spite of himself, the little thin hand spoke so eloquently.

'Because you have lost all your money, and are so dread-

fully unhappy. Was there a great deal, Mr. Garth?'

'Well, it was a tolerably large sum, at least for me,' he replied gravely.

'And God has taken it away from you; that is very sad,

is it not? I don't like to think of you being poor, it makes me feel bad all over.'

'Why, Emmie, I never expected you to feel it like this! You must not trouble your dear little head about my affairs.'

'I am sorry, but not half so sorry as Queenie is, I know, though she says so little about it. She never talks now, at least hardly at all, and she has not told me stories for ever so long; but she sits and looks at the fire, and sometimes her eyes are full of tears, though she thinks I do not see them.'

He flushed at this, and a look of pain crossed his face.

'She may have troubles of her own; she will not like you to tell me this,' he began in an embarrassed tone; but Emmie was too much engrossed with her subject to heed him.

'Shall you be very poor?' she persisted; 'shall you be obliged to leave this old house, where you and Langley were born, and go and live in a poky little place in Warstdale, as Cathy says?'

'Cathy knows nothing about it; she ought not to tell you such things,' rather quickly. 'Of course we must leave this house, and of course we shall have to work; but we are young, and that will not hurt us. Come, come, things are not so bad as you and Cathy make them out; put all these sad thoughts out of your head. How could they have talked so before the child!' he muttered to himself.

But Emmie was not so easily comforted. She stood silently by Garth a minute, and then her eyes filled, and two large tears coursed slowly down her cheeks.

'Now, Emmie, don't be silly; I can't have you crying over this!' but his tone was kind; and as he spoke he drew the child gently to him.

'I can't help it,' she whispered. 'Cathy says you eat nothing, and that you are getting so thin and ill; and that frightens Queenie, and makes her look grave.'

'Why, this is too absurd!' he began, and then his tone changed. The child would make herself ill if she went on like this. 'Do you think you could make me some tea and some hot buttered toast if I were to promise to eat it? Now I think about it I am rather faint, and hot buttered toast is a particular luxury of mine. Langley will find you the toasting-fork and things if you go and ask her.'

In a moment Emmie's tears were dried by magic, and the little red hood laid aside. When, half an hour afterwards, Queenie entered the house in some alarm to know what had become of Emmie, she found a little scene that surprised her.

Garth and Emmie were seated with a little round table between them; a choice pile of buttered toast, done to a nicety, lay on the young man's plate. Emmie's face was flushed with excitement and heat, her hands were slightly blackened.

'He has promised to eat all that!' she cried out, pointing with the teapot in the direction of Garth's plate; 'and he says he feels better already. I have made the tea so strong, just as he likes it. Langley let me go to the caddy myself!

Garth rose with a droll expression and shook hands with

Queenie.

'Emmie has played truant, I am afraid. She has got it into her head that I am starving myself to death as the best way of escaping my difficulties. I have had to eat and drink before her to dissipate the unpleasant idea.'

'Oh, Emmie! how could you think of running away like this?' exclaimed her sister, fondly pressing the child's fair head between her hands; but she said very little to either of them after that. In the months to come that little scene often recurred to her, and the strange, embarrassed look on Garth's face as she entered.

More than a week had elapsed since the two conspirators had met in the little parlour at Brierwood Cottage. Queenie was just beginning to feel that the suspense was becoming terrible, when one night, as she was sitting alone after Emmie had gone to bed, she heard Mr. Logan's voice in the entry, and in another moment he came in shaking the raindrops off him.

'Well,' he said, beaming on her through his spectacles. 'I have not kept you too long waiting, have I? Of course you have been very anxious, but a delicate matter like this required plenty of time and management.'

'Oh yes, I know,' she replied hastily; 'but, all the same, my suspense has been dreadful. Tell me quickly, Mr. Logan.

Has he taken it?'

<sup>&#</sup>x27;He has.'

'Oh, thank Heaven!' she exclaimed, and turned away lest the relief and joy should be too legibly written on her face.

'It has been a difficult job,' he went on, sitting down and spreading his white, finely-shaped hands over the blaze. 'At one time I feared whether I could carry it through. He was so hard to manage; but I timed it well, and spoke before Miss Clayton. I knew I could count on her common sense to help me.'

'But how did you begin! Did you say the words I put into your mouth? Tell me all about it, please,' and Queenie tried to compose her glowing face.

'I can hardly remember my words. I said very little at first. I told Garth that a sum of money had lately come into my possession, and was lying idle at the Carlisle Bank; that it was there, and that I intended to make no use of it; and I entreated him, for his sisters' sake, to lay aside his pride and accept the loan offered to him.'

'Well?'

'Well, he was very difficult at first. He seemed cut up, poor fellow, and very low over the whole business. He would have it that it was dishonest to help himself to another man's money unless he could see his way clear to repay it in a fair time; that his embarrassment was such that, even with this help, it might be two or three years before he could perfectly right himself; that he had had other losses lately; and that perhaps the wisest course would be to throw up the Works and take a manager's place himself. "We should not starve on a hundred and fifty a year, and Ted would earn something," he said more than once.'

'Of course you did not give in to him?'

'No; I grew tremendously eloquent, and Langley helped me. I talked myself hoarse for nearly two hours before I could move him. I hurled all sorts of thunders at him. I anathematised the Clayton pride as an unholy thing. I told him that it was a grievous sin against charity to refuse the help of a friendly hand when it was stretched out to save him. What would have been thought of the conduct of the poor traveller if he had refused the assistance of the good Samaritan; if he had lain there in his obstinacy, declaring that no such bindings up of oil and wine should be his?'

'Ah, you had him there.'

'Well, he did look a little uneasy at that; and then I plied him with arguments. Did he think it a manly thing to let his sisters go out into the world and work because he could not do as other men did under such circumstances, and bend that pride of his? I noticed he winced at that. And then I upbraided him with his want of friendship. What did Charlotte and I want with the money? we had sufficient for our simple needs. Buy books with it? for he actually suggested that in a feeble sort of way. Did he think we were such lukewarm Christians that we should lay it out in luxuries while our dearest friends were on the brink of ruin?'

'I can well imagine your eloquence.'

'It was worse than preaching half a dozen sermons. I was just getting weary and out of breath when Langley came to my rescue, and begged him, with tears in her eyes, not to grieve me; and then between us we talked him into a better and more hopeful state of mind.'

'And he consented to accept it at last?'

'Yes; he is to draw two hundred and fifty to-morrow to meet some bills that are pressing upon him, and next week he is to take three hundred more, that will put him straight; but he will require the remainder for current expenses. It appears there will be little or no profit coming in from the Works for the next six months. His great fear is that he may not be able to repay me for two or three years.'

'What does that matter?' exclaimed the girl joyfully. 'Oh, Mr. Logan, how shall I thank you for doing what you have done to-night? How did he look? and what did

Langley say to you?'

'Well, he looked very pale, poor fellow; but I think on the whole he is very grateful and relieved. I know he wrung my hand nearly off when I took my leave. I felt such a consummate hypocrite when Miss Clayton burst into tears, and thanked me for saving her brother. I wonder what they would say if they knew the truth?'

'Hush! we will not say anything about that. Have you come straight from Church-Stile House? does Miss Cosie know yet?'

'No; but I must tell her directly I get home. By the bye, where is Miss Catherine, I missed her to-night?'

'She is spending the evening with Mrs. Stewart. Dr. Stewart has gone over to Karldale for the night. Mrs. Chester is very ill, and there is to be a consultation.'

'Her days are numbered, poor soul, at least I greatly fear so,' he returned very gravely, and soon afterwards he took

his leave.

Queenie could scarcely compose herself to sleep that night, her relief was so intense; but in the morning the old fear obtruded itself. Could they rely with any degree of safety on Miss Cosie?

'Solomon tells us, that in the multitude of counsellors there is wisdom,' she thought to herself; 'but I do not think it holds good in the case of a dear fussy little old maid like Miss Cosie.' And then she groaned in spirit, and finally decided to go then and there to the Vicarage, and threaten that harmless old maiden with all sorts of pains and penalties if she did not keep that busy tongue of hers in order.

She found her in an old wooden outhouse, that went by the name of the dairy, busily skimming a great bowl of yellow cream, with the inevitable grey shawl pinned round

her, and a little drawn grey hood tied over her curls.

When she caught sight of her visitor she dropped her spoon, and came clattering over the brick floor in her little

clogs.

'Dear, dear, it is never you, Miss Marriott! and not a wink of sleep have I got all night with thinking of you and those poor creatures at Church-Stile House; but there, there, I must not upset you,' went on the little woman breathlessly, reaching up on tiptoe to kiss her.

'Dear Miss Cosie, I knew how glad you would be.'

'Glad! I couldn't coin the word that would express my feeling. I seem as though I were made of indiarubber, I feel so drawn out and expanded with sheer happiness. It is a mountain that is lifted off me and Christopher, that's what it is,' continued the soft-hearted little creature, wiping her eyes, and dimpling all over her round bright face. 'Dear, dear, to think that you are a rich woman, and all the rest of it.'

'Now, Miss Cosie, remember this is a great secret,' began Queenie solemnly.

'My dear, I wouldn't breathe a word to a soul, not if it were to save my life. Didn't Christopher tell me all about it last night, sitting there in his big chair, looking so good and beautiful, more fit to be lifted straight up to heaven, as I always say, than to be down here in father's big elbow-chair, and with the tears all but running down his cheeks, so that he had to take off his spectacles to wipe them ?'

'But. Miss Cosie---'

'And to begin in that joking way, too,' went on Miss Coxie, too intent on her reminiscences to heed the interruption. "Well, Charlotte, my dear,"—I hardly thought I should be deceived at my time of life in this barefaced manner,—"what do you think this sly little puss of a school-mistress has been doing?" that's how he began.'

'I wish I had been behind the door.'

'Why, it was as good as a play, and he enjoying my fright, for I was quite in a fuss and worry in a moment. "Don't tell me that our Miss Marriott could do anything wrong, for I won't believe it, Kit," I returned; "for she is as good a girl as ever lived, and a better sister to that poor little sickly child never breathed, and you may take my word for it, as sure as my name is Charlotte Logan."

'Thank you for that, dear Miss Cosie.'

"Don't put yourself out, Charlotte, there is no reason for it," he answers, quite calmly. "I am not saying a word against Miss Marriott's goodness; but she is a sly little creature for all that, for she is hiding from us all that she is a rich woman, with a tidy little fortune of five thousand a year." Dear, dear, the maze I was in when he said that!

'If only I had been there!' ejaculated Queenie feelingly.

'I wouldn't believe it for a long time, and then it seemed to come on me like a flash. "Why, of course, Kit, my dear," I said, as well as I could speak for crying, for he had been telling me all about the Brierwood Cottage conspiracy, as he called it, and a more blessed deed of charity never reached my ears; but it shall be restored fourfold, pressed out and running over, and all that, my dear, you may rest assured of that. "Why, it stands to reason, Kit, my dear," I said, "that a young lady like Miss Marriott, who has the carriage of a duchess, and puts on her clothes well, and always holds her

head high, and looks you in the face, and moves about as though she knew there was a barouche and pair waiting for her round every corner; why, it stands to reason that a noble young creature like that should turn out to be somebody."

But, Miss Cosie,' exclaimed Queenie, trying not to laugh in the little woman's face, 'I am the same that I was before; it does not make any difference in me, really, because Emmie's

uncle chose to leave me all his money.'

'No, my dear, certainly not; and of course in church you will always call yourself a miserable sinner, and all that, and of course that will be right and proper; but if only you could have heard what Christopher said about you! but I must not make you vain.'

'Ah, Mr. Logan has been so good in helping me; he has managed everything so cleverly,' returned Queenie, thankful to turn Miss Cosie's thoughts into a less embarrassing channel.

'My dear, you have no conception of Christopher's cleverness; he ought to be the bishop of the diocese, or the prime minister, with that head of his. No one can hold a candle to him, that is what I always say; he is the wisest and the best and the cleverest man I ever knew, in spite of his never remembering to take a clean handkerchief out of his drawers unless I put it ready for him. Why, he actually ran after the bishop in that old patched dressing-gown of his; but I have told you that story before,' interrupting herself just in time, and stopping to take breath. Now was Queenie's opportunity.

"Miss Cosie,' she began, still more solemnly than before, 'you know this is a great secret, and that it must be only

known to us three.'

'Yes, yes; of course, my dear.'

'If the truth were to leak out in any way the whole plan will be spoilt. Mr. Clayton would not touch the money if he knew it were mine and not Mr. Logan's, and then he and Langley and Cathy would be ruined.'

'My dear, as though I would breathe a syllable!'

'No; you will not mean to say a word, but, all the same, a hint or a moment's forgetfulness would betray us. Ah, there is Langley coming up the garden; she has come, of course,

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to thank you as well as Mr. Logan. Dear, dear Miss Cosie,

do promise to be careful!'

'There, there, you are quite agitated, and no wonder; but you may trust me; oh, you may trust me!' returned Miss Cosie with a soothing pat and nod.

But she had no time to add more, for Langley was approaching them with her pale face brightened with unwonted smiles.

'Dear Miss Cosie, I hardly know what I am to say to you and Mr. Logan,' she exclaimed, clasping the little woman in her arms with unusual warmth, for Langley, in spite of her gentleness, was not a demonstrative woman.

'There, there, say nothing at all about it,' returned Miss Cosie hurriedly and nervously; 'that is by far the wisest plan, is it not, Miss Marriott?' appealing in some alarm to her voung companion.

'Yes; Miss Cosie would rather not be thanked,' returned

Queenie in a low voice.

Must I not tell you good dear people what I think of you both ?' continued Langley in her soft, persuasive manner. 'When one's heart is brimming over with gratitude one cannot refrain from speaking. I always knew what unselfish Christians you were, but now you have proved it without doubt.'

'Oh, my dear, this is dreadful! pray, pray do not say any more; you make me quite unhappy,' exclaimed Miss Cosie, putting up her plump hands in dismay. 'Miss Marriott, if

you love me, ask this dear soul not to say any more.'

'I think it upsets her and Mr. Logan to be thanked,' observed Queenie, turning her face a little aside, for Miss Cosie's helplessness and terror moved her to inward laughter.

'I think I would let it be, Langley.'

'Yes, do, there's a dear good creature,' returned Miss Cosie, breathing a little more freely; 'it cuts one like a knife to hear you, and then to know that one has nothing to do with the matter at all.'

'Miss Cosie means that she and Mr. Logan have no present use for the money, that they did not intend to spend it,' put in Queenie calmly; 'but she is so flurried and upset by the whole business that it is kindest not to talk to her at all upon the subject. It only distresses her kind heart,' went

# 'YOU KNOW THIS IS A GREAT SECRET'

on the young girl with the utmost calmness, though her heart sank over Miss Cosie's first blunder.

And Langley, with her usual tact, quietly changed the subject.

But Queenie returned home ill at ease.

'I feel as though I were walking over a mine that might explode at any moment under my feet,' she said to Mr. Logan when he came to her the next day to inform her that Garth had paid that visit to the Carlisle Bank. 'I hardly dare trust Miss Cosie out of my sight.'

'Oh, it will be all right,' he answered soothingly; 'in a few days the subject will have blown over, and she will have forgotten all about it. Don't trouble yourself. This little plot of yours is making you nervous.'

'I think it is,' she returned frankly; 'my peace of mind is quite gone, and I do nothing but anticipate difficulties; but, all the same, I would not undo our work,' smiling in her old bright manner.

# CHAPTER XXXVIII

#### CROSS PURPOSES

When love shall, pitying, call me home,
To that sweet, sweet home that has long been here,
With yearning rapture my eyes will roam
O'er throngs of the sainted worshippers.
For I think the child with the starry eyes,
Who vanished away to that far-off land,
Will look from some window in Paradise,
And beckon me in with her tiny hand.'

HELEN MARION BURNSIDE.

QUEENIE'S forebodings were not verified, for, in spite of two untoward circumstances, the greater part of the winter passed quietly to the inhabitants of the cottage and Church-Stile House.

Only two things marred its perfect harmony. Garth had not yet spoken, and Cathy had bade good-bye to her friends at Hepshaw, and had begun her London work in earnest.

Queenie felt the loss of her friend bitterly; every one missed the bright, light-hearted girl. Cathy's moods had of late been strangely variable: fits of despondency had alternated with bursts of wild, exuberant spirits; a certain sweet recklessness had tinged even her farewell greetings.

They were all at the station to see her off, even Mr. Logan and Miss Cosie, and at the last moment Dr. Stewart appeared.

Queenie seemed utterly quenched, and Langley looked depressed and tearful; but Cathy looked at them all with her bright, resolute smile.

'Good-bye, dear friends; don't miss me too much; before

long I shall be amongst you again,' she said, as she waved her hand gaily, and the train moved slowly away.

A curiously sweet expression crossed Mr. Logan's face as he walked by Queenie's side down the path bordered by planetrees that led from the station to the Deerhound.

'Miss her! how can we help missing her?' cried the girl, appealing to him with sorrowful eyes, as though to claim his sympathy. 'Langley will be dreadfully lonely without her, and as for Emmie and me! why, she was the only friend that we had at Granite Lodge, the dearest, and the kindest, and the bravest.' But here Queenie's eulogy ended in a little sob.

'Young things love to try their strength,' replied Mr. Logan softly. 'We would fain clip their wings, but they would be sure to grow again. When I think of Miss Catherine,' he went on, his eyes darkening strangely, 'going out so bravely to her work in the heart of the great city without a tear on her bright face, however much her heart may be aching at leaving us all behind, I cannot help thinking of the white dove flying all those days over those wastes of water, with the olive branch in its mouth, and what Noah must have felt when he pulled it into the ark. It did not come to him even of its own accord, the wild weary thing, but he must needs put out his hand and draw it into its refuge.'

Queenie looked up at him somewhat startled, but he did not seem to notice her surprise; his eyes had a far-off, abstracted look in them, and during the remainder of the walk he preserved an almost unbroken silence.

Cathy wrote long, cheery letters, full of amusing descriptions. She liked her work on the whole, she told them, and was not daunted by the difficulties that beset the path of beginners. 'It was all in the day's work,' as she wrote; 'and what was the good of possessing a fount of endurance fit for a Spartan woman if there was nothing to bear. In fact, I am determined to serve my noviciate properly, and to make the best of things. I am no more inclined to see bugbears now than I was to discern Emmie's particular ghost in the old garret at Granite Lodge; so make your mind easy, my precious old Queen, and do not indulge in any more troublesome fancies on my account.'

Queenie did not show these letters to any one but Emmie; but the two gloated over them in private, and tried to imagine Cathy in her black stuff dress and little white cap, moving among the dim wards with her light springy step hushed so as not to disturb the sleepers, 'looking not a bit like our Cathy, but like any other ordinary person,' as Emmie observed with a sigh. But if Queenie missed her friend now, the time was to come when she would yearn for her out of the fulness of an overcharged and wounded heart; when her first thought would be, 'If only Cathy were here.'

Things were not quite satisfactory between herself and Garth Clayton. The young man had grown strangely shy in his ways with her, and held himself almost entirely aloof from the cottage.

The fact was, Garth was in a predicament.

He was more in love than ever; but in his present circumstances marriage was out of the question. How was he to bring home a wife to the old home, entangled as he was by a load of debt and difficulties?

Garth was perfectly honest in his intentions. He had made up his mind that Queenie Marriott was the woman he loved; but he had a man's horror of a long engagement. 'What's the good of telling a girl you love her if you can't see your way clear to make her your wife?' he always said; and he acted on this opinion so thoroughly that his quiet withdrawal of attentions filled the girl's heart with dismay.

'Would he be so cold and distant with me if he really loved me?' Queenie asked herself. 'He never comes to see me now, and if I go up to Church-Stile House he is always so busy, and seems as if he fears to be alone with me. Does he think that I want him to pay me attentions if he has ceased to care for me in the way he did?' asked the girl, her breast heaving at the thought; and she mourned for the loss of her friend, and in her secret soul refused to be comforted.

But she knew nothing of the conflict that went on under that assumed coldness of manner that wounded her so greatly.

Garth found his life anything but easy just now; to be

sure, ruin no longer stared him in the face, but his debt was a secret torment to him, and fretted his proud nature with a sense of positive injury.

He would fain have drawn out as little as possible of the sum placed for his benefit, but his needs were pressing. Scarcity of orders, the rise in the men's wages, the heavily-freighted accounts of the cottages he had so lavishly provided for his workmen, had obliged him to expend already seven or eight hundred pounds of the money. The quarry was now in good working order again; and in a few months the young master of Warstdale trusted that he would be enabled to repay the first instalment of the debt; and then, and not till then, would he open his lips to speak any words of love.

Garth was capable of keeping any resolution that he had formed. It was no fear of betraying himself that made him avoid Queenie; but the girl's presence was so sweet to him, and the longing to tell what was in his heart was so great, that the pain of such silence was unendurable to him.

And so he quietly withdrew himself, and went on with his daily work as though no such thoughts were his; and Queenie meekly accepted her banishment and bore Langley's reproaches on her unsociability as patiently as she could, until Langley discovered how matters were, and held her peace ever afterward like a wise woman, and petted and made much of the girl when she came down to the cottage.

And Queenie saw little of Garth, only lifting her brown eyes timidly to his face when she met him in the village, and he stopped to exchange a greeting with her and Emmie; but he never once said, 'Why do we see you so seldom at Church-Stile House?' but only asked kindly after her and the child's welfare, and bade her wrap up Emmie and cherish her now the bitter winter weather had set in.

Queenie ate her Christmas dinner at the Vicarage, with only Mr. Logan and Miss Cosie; and her New Year's Day was spent at Juniper Lodge. The Claytons were not present on either of these occasions; Garth had gone up to London to see Cathy, and Langley had spent both days at Karldale Grange in Gertrude Chester's sickroom. A long season of suffering that no skill could avert or tenderness alleviate

had set in for the unhappy woman, and Langley's services were

in constant requisition.

Now and then Mr. Chester came over to Hepshaw. He always paid a visit to the cottage, and would go up, as a matter of course, into Emmie's little room, and sit for a long time by the empty bed where his darling had slept her little life away, and then he would come sorrowfully down again, and he and Queenie would talk softly of the child and her endearing ways.

These visits always made Queenie feel very sad. Times had not mitigated the father's heavy loss. He still mourned heavily for his little Nan. His florid face looked pale and haggard. A few threads of grey were clearly perceptible in the golden-brown hair; but his eyes always lighted up with

a look of tenderness when Queenie mentioned his wife.

'Ah, my poor Gertie,' he would say sorrowfully. 'You would scarcely know her, Miss Marriott, she is so changed; she suffers so terribly. Langley will have told you; and yet since the death of our little darling there has never been a word or breath of complaint. She endures her worst agonies with fortitude; even Dr. Stewart marvels at her, and says he had never witnessed greater stoicism. It is only "Hold my hand, Harry," or "I shall soon be relieved, dear husband, when this attack has passed," just that, and nothing more.'

'Yes, indeed; Langley cannot say enough in her praise,

she says her self-control is wonderful.

'Poor soul, she's fighting away her life by inches. You cannot tell what a man feels when he sees his wife suffering and is helpless to relieve it. Sometimes I think that for her sake I shall be thankful when it is over, and she is with the thild. I can't get it out of my mind that she ought to have her mother or myself to take care of her; she must feel so lost in that great glittering place.'

'She is safer and better cared for there than even in your

arms, dear Mr. Chester.'

'Yes, I know; and Gertie reproves me and says I am a sad heathen, and so I am; but I am sure of one thing,' speaking in a voice of suppressed emotion: 'that if I am ever good enough—God help me for the sinner that I am,—but if I am ever helped to win an entrance in heaven, that my little

Nan will be the first to see me, and she will come running to me, the darling, and I shall feel the clasp of her sweet arms about me, and the softness of her baby face against mine; and "Father's come," she will say that first, I know,' breaking off hurriedly as the tears came into Queenie's eyes.

'And a little child shall lead them.' The words seemed to come to her mind with sudden, irrepressible force. What if he were right, though he spoke only the language of love's fantasy? Might not the baby hand be stretched out to him through the darkness and silence that lay between those two loving souls, ever beckoning him on to possible good and high endeavour, through devious wanderings, past yawning pitfalls, over the tumultuous sea of life, beckoning with faint invisible touches, ever higher and higher.

'Father's come.' Fanciful, and yet what more probable in the mystery of Providence and God's dealing with men than this, that amid the shining crowds the form of his little Nan should softly glide towards him; and even there in God's bright home a little child should lead him?

And so with all apparent quietness, but with many secret anxieties, the winter wore softly away.

A week's holiday at Christmas had given the young schoolmistress a short reprieve from her duties, and she had taken advantage of it to pay a three days' visit to her old friend Caleb Runciman. Emmie had pleaded hard to accompany her, but the weather was unusually inclement, and Queenie shrank from exposing the child's delicacy to such a test; so she remained under Mrs. Fawcett's charge, as Langley was engrossed with continual visits to Karldale Grange.

Caleb and Molly made much of their visitor, but the old

man grumbled a good deal over his favourite's looks.

'Well, Miss Queenie, I don't believe school-keeping has agreed with you after all,' he began, shaking his head. 'She is thin, Molly, is she not, and looks a bit graver than she used to look?'

'Now, Caleb, don't begin fancying such nonsense. I was never better in my life. Think of this hearty meal I have just eaten; thin indeed!' and Queenie opened her brown eyes and threw up her pretty head with a movement of disdain.

'Of course you must be having your own way, Miss

Queenie, dear,' returned the old man as he lighted his pipe; 'but, all the same, I don't believe that Hepshaw air agrees with you both. There, why the precious lamb has a cough, didn't you tell Molly so just now? and you are ever so much thinner yourself, my pretty; and when is it all going to end, this play-acting, the schoolmistressing, I mean, and you and the blessed lamb settle down comfortably, like sensible-minded Christians, in a nice handsome home of your own, eh, Miss Queenie?'

'Why, I don't know, Caleb,' stammered the girl, rather, startled at this very direct question, 'I don't know at all; I have not made up my mind. Not before the end of the summer; no, certainly not before then.'

Caleb laid down his pipe with a dissatisfied look.

'I thought better of your common sense, I did, indeed, Miss Queenie.'

'Now, Caleb, if you are going to be cross I shall tell Molly to pack up my bag, and I shall just take the next train home. What is the good of being an heiress if one is never to have one's own way?'

'You have had it for a pretty long spell, I'm thinking,' returned the old man with unusual pettishness, but the girl's whim fretted him sorely. 'Mark my words, Miss Queenie, you will play at this thing a bit too long.'

'I shouldn't wonder if you were right,' a touch of gravity replacing her fun; 'and I think myself that it would be as well to fix a limit, for fear I should be tempted to put off the evil hour.'

'Eh, eh! now you are going to be sensible.'

'I must have six clear months. Let me see, I will say the first of August. There, Caleb, on the first of August I will enter into possession of my riches. Will that content you?'

'Why not say May or June, Miss Queenie?'

'No; not a day, not an hour before,' returned the girl resolutely. 'My dear old friend, this is not a whim only; it is real stern necessity. The dearest friends I possess have been in great trouble, as you know, and my seeming poverty has enabled me to help them; it is for their sake, not mine, that I am making this further delay. There, it is decided; and now let us talk of something else,' she finished gaily.

But Caleb was only half mollified.

'She is thinner, and looks different somehow,' he said to his faithful confidante, Molly, that night. 'There is a peaking look in her brown eyes, like a half-fledged bird that sees its nest, but can't find its way to it. I doubt that she is

not quite happy, Molly.'

'Nay; she is no different from other young girls,' returned Molly shrewdly. 'Bless your dear heart, Mr. Runciman, they are all alike! they fret a bit, and then cheer up. It is the law of nature, that's where it is; she will be as perky and chirping-like as ever by and by,' and Molly, who knew the symptoms well, and had buried her own sweetheart many years ago, changed the subject with womanly tact and sympathy.

# CHAPTER XXXIX

### 'TOO MANY COOKS'

'Make the doors upon a woman's wit, and it will out at the casement; shut that, and 'twill out of the keyhole; stop that, 'twill fly with the smoke out of the chimney.'—SHAKESPEARE.

It was a mild day in February, and as Queenie closed the door of the little schoolhouse, and walked up the field that led to the Vicarage, it seemed to her as though the very air held a promise of spring. Now Queenie, like all healthy young creatures, dearly loved the springtime; to her imaginative temperament there could be nothing more beautiful and satisfying than to watch this spectacle of a faded and dead nature rising again into fresh life.

'How can people say there is no hereafter, when the miracle of the resurrection is every year repeated before our eyes?' she said to herself. To her there was ever a fresh pleasure in seeing the brown, lifeless limbs of the elms and sycamores gradually clothe themselves, first with budding shoots, and then with fair, green leaves. The bursting hedgerows, the unfolding of the fronds of ferns, the first peep of the fairy white bells of snowdrops, the pale glitter of primroses, and the fragrance of violets, gave her a positive feeling of happiness.

Everything so new, so fresh, so fair, soiled by no dust, scorched by no burning sunshine; the whole world bright and unsullied as a baby soul, to whom good and evil are unknown mysteries, and life means nothing but perpetual satisfaction and content.

Queenie had a little errand to fulfil at the Vicarage; one

of her scholars was ill, and she wanted Miss Cosie's recipe for a certain compound that Miss Cosie judged to be highly efficacious in such cases.

She entered the little parlour with her usual light step. Miss Cosie was engaged in her usual occupation—knitting socks for her brother. She put down her work with a little flurry when she caught sight of her visitor.

'There, there!' exclaimed the little woman, turning very red, 'Christopher was right, as he always is, dear old fellow;

and of course you've come to scold me.'
'To scold you, dear Miss Cosie?'

'Dear, dear, to think of my poor head getting into such a muddle, and the words slipping out before I knew they were coming. Why, I could have bitten my troublesome tongue I was so vexed with myself; but what was the use of crying over spilt milk? as my poor mother used to say, and a secret is sure to be proclaimed on the housetop some time or other, as I told Mr. Garth.'

'Now, Miss Cosie, what does this mean?' asked Queenie, conscious of an uncomfortable sensation creeping over her; little Janie's sore throat was quite forgotten. 'Do you mean that, after all my entreaties and warnings, you have betrayed me?'

'There, there, perhaps it is not so bad as you think,' returned Miss Cosie, patting her curls nervously, and prefacing her words with a gentle cough; 'it was only just a sentence or two that I let drop to Mr. Garth when he came in here last night for a pleasant chat with Christopher and me.'

'Well?' somewhat sternly, for there was no denying that

Queenie was a trifle angry.

'Well, we were sitting as comfortably as possible; Christopher hadn't come in, he had gone to baptize Wheeler Wilson's baby, and none too soon, for it died this morning; and I took it its little burying gown, and laid it out, the precious blossom, myself. And very touching it was, and the poor mother crying her eyes out, because it looked so pretty; and well, if she does take a drop of spirits now and then—we are all miserable sinners, the very best of us, and Wheeler Wilson is none too careful; and—where was I, dearie? for I have just gone and muddled myself again, I believe.'

'You said you were alone with Mr. Clayton,' returned Queenie, with an inward prayer for patience. Miss Cosie's

garrulity was terribly trying.

'Yes; he was sitting there just where you are, and he was talking and laughing and making-believe to joke,—you know his way,—but all of a sudden he turned serious. "Miss Cosie," he said, "I have never spoken to you about that money. Langley tells me you don't like to be thanked; but, all the same, you and your brother have earned my gratitude for the rest of my life, and I must say, God bless you for it!" flushing up to the roots of his hair, poor young fellow, what with the heat of the fire and his feelings together.'

Queenie's hands clasped each other rather tightly, but she made no observation as Miss Cosie paused to take breath.

'Well, I was turning the heel of my stocking, and I don't believe I rightly took in the meaning of his words. "You have nothing to thank us for," I said, as innocently as possible. "We would have lent it you and welcome, over and over again, Mr. Garth," I said; "but Kit is as poor as a church-mouse, and we hadn't more than a matter of ninety pounds or so in the Bank."

'Miss Cosie, were you in your senses?' burst from

Queenie's indignant lips.

'Well, I was a bit dazed, I believe, for turning the heel of a stocking is rather a delicate job to do by the firelight, and Dolly had forgotten to light the lamp; but I was frightened as soon as I had said it, for there he was staring at me with his eyebrows lifted, and making me all of a "Ninety! you mean nine hundred pounds, Miss Cosie!" he said, quite sharply, for he could not make me out at all. "No; ninety, Mr. Garth," I returned, for I knew I had gone too far, and a lie is a thing I have never taken on my lips; but I was all of a shake thinking about what Christopher and you would say to me, and there he was forcing the truth out of me with his eyes. "What's the use of trying to deceive him?" I thought, "I am brought to book, and nothing but a heap of falsehoods can save me," and a falsehood has never come natural to me since I was a baby, and poor mother read to me the story of Ananias and Sapphira,' finished Miss Cosie in her innocent way.

'Go on ; I am listening,' sighed Queenie in a resigned voice. 'Well, I couldn't tell a direct story, as I said before, but I thought just a tiny bit of deception wouldn't be wrong. "There is only ninety pounds now, Mr. Garth," I went on; but that wouldn't do at all. "I don't like the look of this." he muttered, and such a frown came over his face, for he was getting put out with my stammering and nervousness. "Miss Cosie, tell me the truth, as you are an honest woman; did you and Mr. Logan lend me these nine hundred pounds ?" "Why, no, Mr. Garth," I answered, for there was no evading such a direct question. "Then, in the name of Heaven, who did lend me the money?" he asked, looking as cross and perplexed as possible. Well, I didn't want to answer him till Christopher came in, for I felt I had done enough mischief for one evening, so I let him guess one person after another, till he jumped up and said he could bear it no longer; he would go out and find Mr. Logan, or perhaps Miss Marriott might be in the secret, and could give him an idea who his secret benefactor was. Yes; he would go and ask her first, for she always spoke the truth, and would tell him at once if she knew who had lent him the money.'

'I wish he had come to me. Yes; I wish he had spoken to me himself,' murmured Queenie.

'Dear, dear, to think of that! and all I thought was to prevent his coming. "You must not go near her, Mr. Garth," I said, "for she is so sensitive that she would half break her heart if you were to say an angry word to her; and the poor child meant well when she lent you the money."—"The poor child! what do you mean, Miss Cosie!" for he thought me daft, I could see that. "I was talking of Miss Marriott, what has she got to do with it, I should like to know!"
"Dear, dear, this is dreadful, Mr. Garth," I cried, for he was standing over me, and wringing the truth out of me by inches. "Why don't you go and ask Christopher, he will tell you all about it?"—"I will," he answered, quite steadily, but there at the very moment was Kit standing on the threshold looking at us, and I clapping my hands with joy to see him.'

'And what did Mr. Logan say?' asked Queenie, with a proud flush upon her face.

'Well, there was no keeping it back after that. Kit told him everything clearly out, and how you were a rich woman and all that, and how you had begged and prayed him to lend the money in his name.'

'Tell me, tell me quickly, for I can bear no more, did

Mr. Clayton seem very angry?'

'Angry? oh, dear no, returned Miss Cosie soothingly. 'All his fierceness died away, and he seemed quite lamblike directly Christopher spoke. After the first exclamation of surprise he never said a word, but just sat looking as pale and dazed as possible until Kit had finished all he had to say, and then he got up and said that he must tell Langley, and he shook hands with me and Christopher and went away.'

'And he said nothing more?'

'No; his eyes looked a little queer, and I noticed his hand felt cold, but he would not listen to me when I pressed him to have some hot elder wine. I do believe he was quite in a maze with astonishment, being taken so aback, poor young man.'

'Thank you for telling me all,' Queenie said very quietly, as she stood up and drew on her gloves. Little Jane's sore throat was quite forgotten; she was rather pale, and her lips trembled slightly as she spoke, but there was no trace of ex-

citement in her manner.

'And you are not vexed with me, my dear?'

'Oh no, I am not vexed; it may all be for the best, you know.' Her brief wrath had vanished. Who could long be angry with Miss Cosie, with her gentle little mouse-face and tender-hearted ways? she was not to blame, surely, for this

strange sinking of heart, for these uneasy fears?

Something must have happened to the spring sunlight; it was so much less radiant as she crossed the threshold of the Vicarage, a little of the glory and freshness had died out of it somehow. 'Can he really be angry with me? I feel I cannot bear this suspense a moment longer; I must know the worst at once. Ah! is it possible?' and a slight trembling passed over the girl's frame, for there was Garth Clayton coming up the Vicarage lane, and in another moment they would meet face to face.

Miss Cosie had not been wrong in her account of Garth's

utter bewilderment the previous night: the news had simply stunned him. He had gathered up his scattered forces, and had wished them good-night, and then he had gone home straight to Langley.

A sudden craving for sisterly sympathy had taken possession of him; he must find some outlet for the bitterness that was in him. He was battling bravely with untoward circumstance, but this fresh misfortune that had overtaken him had deprived him temporarily of all courage. That the sweetness of the hope within him should be so utterly quenched; oh, it was hard, terribly hard!

Langley looked up a little startled as he threw himself into his easy-chair. The old careworn expression had returned

again; he looked pale and moody.

'Is there anything wrong? is it about Harry?' she faltered, for the poor soul had been occupied that evening with her own troubles, and was full of fears that needed tranquil-

lising.

'Wrong! oh no! Will you sit down and write a note of congratulation to Miss Marriott? and will you say something very nice and kind from us both, Langley? One does not come into a fortune every day, and of course she would wish to be congratulated,' and then with a sort of enforced quietness he told her all that he had lately heard at the Vicarage; and when he had finshed Langley's face wore a look of great perplexity.

Stop a minute, Garth. I don't think I quite understand. Are you sure that you have told me rightly; that Mr. Calcott has left all his money to Miss Marriott, and that she and Emmie are rich, and have secretly lent us all this money?

'Emmie knows nothing about it. I am sure I told you

that,' impatiently.

'Ah, she has kept it even from her. Well, perhaps that was wisest under the circumstances; and in her goodness of heart she had made herself your creditor. Yes, I understand; it is very strange. I cannot half believe it, but I think it is good news and need not make you unhappy.'

'Is that all you have to say about it?' with renewed

bitterness.

'Oh no; I have a great deal to say about it. I am very

fond of Miss Marriott; I like her better every day. I hope you do not mean to be angry with her about this.'

Then he was silent.

'I almost wish she had confided in us from the first,' went on Langley thoughtfully. 'All disguises are perilous, however well-intentioned; but she has planned this loan with the utmost delicacy and consideration for your feelings. As far as we are concerned she has behaved with the truest generosity; I think you must own that yourself.'

'Truth is better than generosity,' he answered gloomily.

'I never knew any one so thoroughly frank and honest,' returned his sister, eager to take up Queenie's defence, but conscious of the increasing gloom of his face. 'I do think in these sort of matters you are a little hard.'

Then his bitterness overflowed and burst forth.

'Look here, Langley, I am not a bit hard. I have not a word to say against Miss Marriott; in my opinion she has not perhaps adopted the wisest course. I hate all makebelieves and mysteries, even if they are in a good cause, and I think with you that it would have been far better for her to have told us all about it; but that's not the question. The main point is, that I have gone and made a fool of myself, and it is all no use.'

Langley lifted her quiet eyes to his face, but she only smiled a little at his excitement.

'Oh! it is no use your looking at me like that. You don't believe what I say, but it is true for all that. Haven't I made a fool of myself, and lost my heart to her, and given up Dora for her, and made no end of plans for myself? and now this act of hers has sundered us completely.'

'Why so, dear Garth, when you know as well as I do that Queenie Marriott has grown to care for you?' and Langley's voice was very sweet in her brother's ears as she said this.

'Ah, she is young; she will get over that,' but he shuddered slightly at the sound of his own words. 'I have not spoken to her. I have been careful not to compromise her in the least, remember that, Langley. I am not to blame if she has discovered things for herself.'

'But why put yourself to the needless pain of saying all

this when you care for each other, and must surely, by the leading of a kind Providence, come together in the end?

'Is there a Providence in such cases?' he retorted bitterly. 'I thought people often met too late, or took wrong turnings in life; half these affairs end crookedly.'

'But not yours, my dear brother,' her cheek turning pale at this chance allusion. How often, poor woman, a bow was drawn at a venture and wounded her in this random way!

'Yes, mine. Why not? Am I better than other people? Just look at the bearings of my case: here I am, involved in debt and difficulty, with years of hard work and harass before me, fighting inch by inch for independence; what if I do care for this girl?' his voice softening in spite of himself. 'Do you think I am such a mean, poor-spirited fellow that I should throw myself and my poverty and my family claims at her feet, and ask her to take me in spite of it all, and endow me with her riches?'

'If she loves you her riches need be no obstacle to either

of you,' she returned firmly.

'Well, perhaps not, in your view of the case; I have hardly made up my mind about that. But what of this debt, Langley? do you think I shall know peace until I have wiped it off? To be a debtor to a woman, and, worse than that, to the woman I love; is it within the limits of possibility that I can entertain the thoughts at which you still hint until I have at least paid back to her every farthing of this money?'

'And how long will it take you to do that?'

'Two years, at the present rate of things; at the very best a year and a half.'

'Two years of suspense. Oh, Garth, how cruel!'

'Cruel to act like an honest man, and not take advantage of a simple, inexperienced girl? What does she know of life and men?' he went on; 'has she ever seen any worthy of her interest? For shame, Langley! you are thinking more of me than of her; you are not her best friend by any means. Let her leave us, let her quit Hepshaw, and assume her proper station; let her have the opportunity of judging us fairly, and comparing us with others. How do you or I know that she will not meet with some one far more worthy of her than ever I shall be?'

'Garth, my dear brother, this is truly generous; but I know Queenie, she will stand your test, hard as it is, but she

will suffer terribly.'

'She will not suffer as much as I, who am sending her from me. Do you think it is no suffering to have to alienate her by a coldness I must assume, for her good as well as mine? Do I not know her? am I blind or without feeling? If I were to say to her, "I am poor, but I love you; will you take pity on me?" I am sure—yes, I am sure of what her answer would be; but, as I am an honest man, I will not take such mean advantage of her.'

'Is this your final decision, Garth—to leave her free

for two years?'

'Yes, it is,' he replied slowly, but his face was pale, and he frowned heavily as he spoke. 'It must be two years, I am sure of that, and then I will not speak to her unless I see my way clear before me. And now we had better finish with this; it is somehow getting too painful for me; I suppose I may trust to you not to betray me?'

'I must not give her a hint of your real intentions?'

rather pleadingly.

'Of course not,' he returned sternly; 'that would undo the good and purpose of my sacrifice—to leave her freedom and scope for choice. Promise me you will do nothing of the kind,

Langley.

'Oh, I will promise to do and say nothing of which you would not approve,' she answered meekly. Not for worlds would she add to his trouble by even hinting that she was sorry for his decision, and thought his generosity overstrained. She knew well what he must be enduring, and all the length and breadth and depth of that great pain; but as she leant over him, silently smoothing out with her fingers the lines and furrows of his forehead, and thinking what she might say to comfort him, he suddenly drew her towards him, and kissed her twice very hurriedly, and then got up with a sort of groan and left the room.



# 'HAVE YOU NOTHING TO SAY TO ME?'

'Yet a princely man!—

If hard to me, heroic for himself!'

Mrs. Browning's Aurora Leigh.

WHEN Queenie saw Garth coming towards her she shrank back for a moment in natural trepidation and some little dismay, the meeting was so utterly unexpected; but her self-possession soon returned. 'It is better to get it over,' she said to herself, 'and to know the worst at once.'

They shook hands without looking at each other, and then Garth turned back and walked by her side in silence. Neither knew exactly how to begin the conversation.

Garth was the more nervous of the two; he had passed a sleepless night, and his condition of mind was truly wretched. The bitter impulse that had led him to unburthen his mind to his sister had by this time passed away, but his resolve was still unaltered. As he lay awake in his restlessness he argued the whole matter with himself; pride, and a certain stubbornness of will, may have had a voice in his decision, but the more he thought about it the less he felt that he could take advantage of the girl's evident affection and secure her wealth for himself.

'How can I do this mean thing?' he repeated again and again to himself. 'Even if Langley be right, and she has grown to care for me, it may be only temporary, and she has seen no one else. Ought we not to urge her rather to leave Hepshaw and take her proper position in the world?

It may be a dangerous test perhaps, as Langley says, and it may end in my losing her altogether, for how can I give her her freedom and expect her to be faithful? but at least my conscience will be clear.' And then he swore to himself that, as far as he was concerned, he would not coerce her movements. If she went, his judgment would applaud her resolution; if she stayed, his trouble would be a hard thing to bear, for he must then wrap himself up in reserve and coldness, and this would be difficult to him. 'She cannot really misunderstand me, the thing is too evident,' he said, striving to comfort himself. And indeed he was not without some interior consolation; his very self-sacrifice and unselfishness, constrained and unnecessary as they might appear to others, gave him a certain feeling of strength and security. His conscience was clear, his independence assured and welldefined, while somewhere, deep down in some hidden recess, lay a secret hope of Queenie's steadfastness and fealty. Langley's words still rang sweetly in his ears: 'She will stand the test, severe as it is, but she will suffer terribly.' Ah! well, would he not suffer too?

But this meeting was painful to him. What was he to say to her? and how was he to bring himself to speak of what was in his mind without betraying his hidden trouble, and perhaps hurting her feelings?

'Were you going to see Langley?' he asked, just when

the silence was becoming embarrassing.

'Yes; is she at home?' returned Queenie, venturing to raise her eyes, and then becoming conscious all at once of Garth's paleness, and evident constraint of manner.

'She was sitting at her needlework when I left her just now, and was lamenting that Cathy was not there to help her. I think we miss Cathy more and more every day.'

'I know I do,' sighed Queenie, and there came over her a sudden yearning to unbosom herself to this faithful friend. Langley was good to her, but she was not Cathy.

Garth echoed the sigh; but scarcely for the same reason. Cathy's warm-hearted sympathy would not have helped him.

'I have just left Miss Cosie. Mr. Clayton, have you nothing to say to me, nothing special, I mean?' Queenie was growing desperate, while Garth was secretly marvelling at

her boldness. His paleness and changed looks filled her with dismay. 'I think you must have something to say to me,' with a little sharpness in her voice.

That roused him in a moment.

'Yes; of course we have a great deal to say to you, Miss Marriott. I told Langley last night that she ought to write to you. I need hardly tell you, I suppose, that you have our warmest congratulations on your good fortune?'

'I don't think I care much about congratulations.'

'Nevertheless, you must put up with them,' with a faint smile. 'You must pay the penalty of being a rich woman.'

'Were you very much surprised?' looking him full in the

face; but he did not return her glance.

'I am afraid I must own to a very fair amount of astonishment; such a romantic story has never before been told in

Hepshaw. It savours a little of Hans Andersen.'

'Ah, I know you think me silly, and all that,' she replied, in a voice that was at the same time proud and pained. 'I shall never be able to make any of you understand why I did it. I begin to see a grave ending to my little joke; and yet it made me so happy.'

'I almost wish you had told us from the beginning.'

'That would have spoiled everything. You and Mr. Logan would have made me resign my school at once, and my pleasant summer holiday would have been at an end. Perhaps it was cowardly; but I could not bear being rich.'

'That sounds strange.'

'Ah, but it is true, she returned earnestly. 'Such a little would have contented me; five hundred a year would have made me a happy woman; I told Mr. Logan so. We would have taken a cottage, Emmie and I, larger and prettier than the one we are in, and we should have been as happy as the day is long; but now, what am I to do with it all?' putting out her hands with a sudden gesture of repugnance and helplessness.

He seemed struck with that, and hesitated for a moment before he answered her; there was a certain forlornness in her words and aspect that touched him. They had reached the end of the lane; but now he made a movement as though to retrace his steps, and she turned obediently and walked on again by his side. As she did so he stole a swift glance at her. Did she look any different in his eyes now she was an heiress? His survey took in the tall, slim figure in the simple black dress. That was the hat, surely, to which Dora had objected, and yet how well it suited her. He noted all the little details—the indescribable air of finish that had always pleased his fastidiousness, the set and poise of the pretty head, the mixture of girlish frankness and modesty that gave such a charm to her manner; and then again that inward voice made itself heard. 'Oh, if she were only poor, and I dared speak to her!' and the struggle within him gave a little hardness to his voice.

'I think you ought to look at it in quite another light,' he began gravely. 'It is a great responsibility that has come to you, a talent for which you must account. I don't think you ought to hide it under a bushel in the way you are doing.'

'You mean that Mr. Logan must find another mistress? Brierwood Cottage ought to have another tenant?' she re-

turned huskily, speaking out her greatest fear.

'I certainly do mean something of the kind; but there will be plenty of time to discuss that. You cannot decide on your future plans without a good deal of consideration. At present I have something else to say, something for which I wish I could find adequate words. I don't know,' stammering and hesitating, 'how I am to thank you for your goodness, your generosity——'

'Mr. Clayton,' stopping him, 'will you do me one favour ?'

'What is that?'

'I know what you are going to say, please let it be unsaid.'

'But that is impossible.'

'It need not be impossible. Why should there be any talk of such things between us?'

'Because it is right that there should be such talk. Do you think that I am to say nothing at all about my gratitude?'

'Not to me,' raising her eyes with a pleading look in them that he found difficult to resist. 'If we talk of gratitude you know it is I who am your debtor. Have you forgotten how good you were to us when we were poor and friendless?'

'I have forgotten nothing,' he returned hastily; 'but, all the same, you must let me speak. I am largely in your debt,

Miss Marriott, and for what is to me a very serious sum; but I do hope that in less than two years' time I may be able to repay both interest and capital.'

'As you will,' she replied carelessly, but he saw that she was much hurt. What could this paltry sum matter to her? Could he not understand how great had been the privilege of

helping him?

'You must try to comprehend how we business men feel about such things,' he said gently to her, for there were tears in her eyes, and her face was averted from him. 'It is too late now, but I wish you had given me the option of accepting or refusing the loan.'

'How could I, when I knew you would have refused it from me?' walking on quickly as though afraid of her emotion.

'If I had, my refusal would not have hurt you, I would have made you understand my feelings so thoroughly; but of course it is too late to talk about that now. I suppose I am very proud, but I cannot bear the thought of this debt being between us; all my life I have had such a horror of this sort of difficulty and being beholden to any one.'

'How can you—how can you be so proud with me?' burst forth from her lips. 'Do you mean that this—this trifling act of kindness will come between us and hinder us from

being friends?'

"We must always be friends, I think," he returned, still more gently, for he saw how sorely he was hurting her. "Why should you say such things? you are vexed with me or you would not say them. I wish I could make you understand how truly grateful Langley and I am."

'Langley will not talk to me about principal and interest,' she retorted with a little flash of indignation, 'and—and I

could not have believed that you would have done it.'

'Come, come, I cannot have you vexed with me like this,' he said, stopping her and taking her hand. 'You know I must go directly, and I have wasted ever so much time already. Won't you promise me to think better of it, and not be hurt with me any longer?'

'I don't know,' looking down, for his voice was rather too persuasive in its eloquence.

'You know very well, do you not, that I would not say or

do anything to hurt you really? but my position is a difficult one. I don't think I ever before realised how difficult it was. Things seem all in a tangle somehow, and it is out of my power to right them.'

'Why?' she asked timidly, and her brief indignation died away. Something in his manner reassured her; he had not

really turned against her.

'That is just what I cannot tell you. My affairs have all got crooked, and there is no shaping them. I suppose time and patience are needed, but there's terribly hard work before me. I don't want to lose heart over it. I could not bear you just now to say what you did.'

'About not being friends?'

'Yes; whatever happens we must be friends, dear friends, always. I think you might promise me as much as that.'

'I do promise you that,' she said, looking straight at him; and the expression in her eyes haunted him long afterwards, it was so frank and sorrowful.

'Then I am content,' he replied, and then almost abruptly he lifted his hat and moved away. Had she understood him? Could she follow the meaning of those vague words! Had she comprehended that it was only friendship for which he asked, and with which he professed himself content? He could not make up his mind how far she had understood him.

He would have been almost aghast at his success if he could have read Queenie's thoughts as she went down the lane again, and strove with a sick heart to piece together the

fragments of talk in her memory.

How gentle he had been with her, and yet his very gentleness had been inexorable. Alas! she saw but too plainly that her riches and that miserable debt were dividing them. The pride and independence of the man rose between them like a wall of rock.

'He loves me, but he never means to tell me so,' she said to herself in unutterable bitterness. 'He will break both our hearts first.'

As she entered the drawing-room at Church-Stile House Langley put down her work with a pleasant smile and word of greeting.

'Have you come to be congratulated, my dear?' she said,

taking the girl in her arms, and kissing her with more than usual affection.

Queenie suffered the caress passively, and then sat down by the fire, shivering slightly as though she were cold.

'You have given us all a great surprise.'

'Have I?'

- 'I was so startled when Garth told me last night that I could hardly take in the sense of his words. To think that it is you, and not Mr. Logan, who has been our secret benefactor!'
- 'Don't, Langley; I feel as though I could not talk about it.'
- 'Will you let me talk about it instead, dear Queenie; I feel as though I can never love you enough for what you have done for us, and Cathy will feel the same; it was such true friendship. Ted was here just now singing your praises; I wish you could have heard him.'

Queenie only sighed. What was all this to her if Garth and she were divided.

The heaviness of her aspect moved Langley to compassion. What could have happened to have quenched her brightness so entirely?

'Have you seen Garth?' she asked, taking up her work again, and pretending not to notice her companion; a dull red flushed the girl's face from cheek to brow at the question.

'Yes; I met him just now.'

'He feels very much about all this.'

'Does he?' looking at the fire.

'You must not misunderstand him if he feels the weight of his gratitude rather a heavy burthen just now, he has been sorely tried, poor fellow; and then men think so differently about these sort of things.'

'There is no need for you to make excuses for him,' speaking with difficulty, 'he was very kind, and took great pains to show me he was grateful. Ah! if he only knew how I hate that word,' with a little burst of excitement.

Langley was silent; she understood too well the nature of the wound that had been received. And then what was she to say that would in any degree comfort her?

'I have done nothing deserving of the word,' went on

Queenie vehemently. 'I have given what literally has cost me nothing; it was such a privilege and happiness to help you all.'

'Yes, dear; I quite understand.'

'I could scarcely sleep for happiness, and now it all seems spoiled somehow. I have grown to loathe my riches, and yet I was disposed to love them; they hang like a millstone round my neck. I must give up my school now, and then I suppose Emmie and I must go away.'

'For shame! I will not have you talk in this miserable

fashion.'

'Where is it rich people are expected to live? Caleb wanted me to take a great house in Carlisle, and visit the Dean, and all the great folk in the Close. Fancy Emmie and I visiting at the Deanery!' and the girl laughed half hysterically; 'would any of you come over and see me then, I wonder?'

'Wait and see,' returned Langley with a quiet smile.
'Once friends always friends, that's the Clayton motto.
Have you really made any plans about your future,
Queenie?'

'No, I have made no plans,' she answered drearily; 'there is plenty of time for that. I don't mean to leave Hepshaw yet, unless you all drive me away. I think I will go home now, Langley; I am not quite myself, and all this talk troubles me. I think I will go back to Emmie.' And then Langley again took her in her arms, and kissed her and let her go; she could find no words with which to comfort her, and indeed the girl was very sore at heart.

When she entered her own little parlour she found Emmie lying on the rug in the firelight, in a listless fashion that was habitual with her now. She crept up from the ground rather slowly when she saw her sister; but for once the child's lassitude and evident weakness escaped her notice.

'How late you are, Queen!'

'Yes, dear, very late; I have been sitting with Miss Cosie,

and then with Langley.'

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'Did you get the stuff for little Janie? How tired you look; and how cold your hands are!' as Queenie knelt down mechanically and warmed them over the blaze. 'I was just

feeling very dull, and wishing that you would come in. I

have such dull, stupid thoughts sometimes.'

'You shall tell me about them presently,' returned her sister hastily; 'I want to speak to you now. Emmie, I have often told you stories, some of them very sad, and that made you cry; but I have a real story to tell you to-night.'

'Oh, not a sad one, Queen.'

'Why not, my sweet?'

'I could not bear it to-night,' answered the child with a shiver; 'I have been seeing pictures in the fire, and they are all the same thing—sad, every one of them; and when I go to sleep at night I always dream of Alice and little Nan, and think I am with them. I have woke up and cried often lately to think what you would do if it were true, and I were obliged to leave you.'

'Oh, Emmie, for pity's sake, hush! I have had as much

as I can bear to-day.'

'And then I ask God to let me stop a little longer, because I am sure that you would be so lonely without me, unless—' and here the childish face wore a wistful expression. 'I wish I were not so young, and then, perhaps, I might help

you.'

'My darling,' not understanding her in the least, 'you always help me! You are the blessing of my life, and I could not do without you at all. Hush! I will not have any more of this,' as Emmie seemed inclined to interrupt her. 'You must listen to my story first, it is very interesting and exciting, and is all about Uncle Andrew.' And then she narrated to her breathless auditor the whole history of the will, and her whim and all its consequences. 'There,' she said as she finished, and speaking with an attempt at cheerfulness, 'isn't that the nicest fairy story I have ever told you?'

'I don't know,' returned the child doubtfully. 'It is very wonderful, and I do love Uncle Andrew very dearly for leaving you all the money; but I don't like being so terribly

rich, Queenie.'

'No, darling; no more do L'

'It was a lovely thought of yours, lending them that money; and it was dear of you to let me have my wish, and

# QUEENIE'S WHIM

for us two to live in this cottage. We shall never be so

happy anywhere else, Queen.'

'Oh, Emmie, I know that too well!' And then, to her own distress and the child's, she suddenly broke down and burst into a fit of weeping. 'Never so happy again, little Emmie; never again!'

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#### CHAPTER XLI

#### 'A GOLDEN-HAIRED CIRCE'

'We cannot fight for love as men may do;
We should be woo'd, and were not made to woo.'
SHAKESPEARE.

WHEN Garth returned from the Quarry that evening, sad and dispirited from his interview with Queenie, he found a letter waiting for him; a messenger had brought it over from Crossgill Vicarage.

'Did you know Dora was at home again ?' Langley asked

him in a little surprise.

But he answered 'No,' very briefly, as he opened the envelope.

A curious vexed smile hovered around his lips as he read the note, and then he handed it to his sister.

'Dear Mr. Clayton,' it began, 'do you know that we have returned from our exile, and are settled at home again? Dear Flo was so well that I ventured on resisting the doctor's orders. Doctors are such old women sometimes; so, as she was quite strong and hearty, and in boisterous spirits, and we were both getting terribly restless, I just wrote to papa and Bee to expect us, and here we are.

'It is so delicious being at home again, and everything looks so beautiful. Bee has been a good girl, and has kept things in tolerable order. Tell Langley, with my love, that I shall come over and see her very soon; and now I have a message for you from papa. He wants to consult you again about that troublesome bit of business, about which he talked to you in the summer. No one helps him so well, and he

thinks so much of your advice; that is great praise from a man of papa's age and experience, is it not? The girls are longing to see you; they are for ever talking about you. Bee was always a great friend of yours, was she not? if I remember rightly, you were rather inclined to snub poor Flo. We all have so much to tell you; so if you will pack up your bag and come over and dine with us to-morrow, you will find your old quarters ready for you. Please do not disappoint us, the girls have set their hearts on seeing you.—Your faithful friend,

'Shall you go?' asked Langley, very quietly, as she replaced the note in the envelope. 'It is rather strange that she has not asked me as well.'

'Mr. Cunningham did not want to consult you, you see,' returned her brother, with an inscrutable smile. 'Yes; I suppose that I shall have to go; there is no getting out of it,' and then he sat down and wrote off a brief note, with the gravest possible face, and gave it himself to the messenger.

When he rose the next morning it was with a sense of having to undergo some ordeal. He had to rest his head that night under the roof of Crossgill Vicarage; and before he sought his pillow he might have to encounter some difficult passage of arms with Dora. It was some months since they had met, and he had still a kindly feeling for his old playmate. If friendship would satisfy her he could promise her a tolerable amount; perhaps she had taken him at his word, and there would be no attempt to draw him again under her influence. Perhaps she had grown reasonable, Dora was always such a sensible creature; and had begun to understand for herself that they would be better apart. If this were so he would eat his dinner with a light heart, feeling that nothing was expected of him.

Above everything he desired that there might be peace between them; he would never willingly make her his enemy. Perhaps some suspicion that she might prove a dangerous adversary at this time crossed his mind. He had great kindness of heart also, and would have hated to disappoint or grieve any woman, especially one for whom he had once entertained a tenderness. It was with somewhat dubious feelings, therefore, that he drove himself up that evening to the Vicarage.

Dora was not as before in the porch to receive him, but the old nurse met him at the door with a pleasant smile on her wrinkled face as she led him into the hall, dusky and warm with firelight.

'The young ladies were in the drawing-room,' she told him

as she helped him off with his overcoat.

Garth stood and warmed himself after his long cold drive and listened, nothing loath, to the old woman's prattle. Nurse was a great friend of his.

There was quite a ruddy glow when the drawing-room door was opened; the soft, harmonious light of the great white china lamps pervaded the long low room. In spite of his dubious feelings Garth could not help admiring that pretty picture of domestic comfort. Dora was in her favourite carved chair working, with Flo curled up on the rug at her feet; another girlish form was half hidden in the recesses of the Vicar's great easy-chair. The white dresses of the girls quite shone in the firelight.

As Dora advanced to meet him Garth was driven to confess to himself that he had never seen her to such advantage. The soft velvet gown that she wore set off her golden hair and beautifully fair skin to perfection. As she gave him her hand with her prettiest smile, a rose-tint, very

like a dawning blush, tinged her cheeks.

'You are very good to come to us to-night,' she said in the lowest possible voice. 'I was half afraid you would be

proud and stay away on purpose to punish me.'

'Why should I wish to punish you?' he answered goodhumouredly. 'So these are your sisters. The question is, which is Beatrix and which is Flo?' and he shook hands with them both with a cordial word or two.

They were both taller than Dora, slim, graceful creatures. Beatrix was the handsomer of the two, with lively dark eyes and an expression of great animation. Flo was plainer, with an odd, piquant face and fair hair like Dora's, which she wore cropped and curly like a boy's.

'Poor Flo has lost all her beautiful hair,' observed her sister, passing her hand regretfully over the curls. 'Is she not grown? and Bee too? They make me look such a little thing beside them.'

'Beatrix has grown such a fashionable young lady that I shall be half afraid of her,' returned Garth, looking at the

girl with kindly interest.

Beatrix's dark eyes shone with pleasure as she answered his smile. The two had been great friends in old times, and many a game of romps had been enacted by them in the Vicarage hall and garden. He had always cared less about Flo, who was somewhat spoiled by her sister, and was in consequence rather pert and precocious. He had ever taken a mischievous delight in snubbing her, or putting her down, as he called it; but Flo was grown up now, and wore long dresses, and had the languid air of a ci-devant invalid, and the snubbing must now be a thing of the past.

Garth and Beatrix had so much to say to each other that Dora at last grew dissatisfied, and bade him, with playful peremptoriness, break off his chatter and get ready for dinner. And then he took himself off rather reluctantly to the porch-room, where he found Nurse coaxing his fire to a

cheerful blaze.

'Isn't Miss Dora looking lovely to-night?' exclaimed the old woman when she caught sight of him; 'for all the world like a picture, in her velvet gown. I do think she is the prettiest creature in the county.'

'I think Miss Beatrix will be far handsomer,' returned Garth, with a little spice of malice and contradiction in his voice. 'She will play havoc with a few hearts before many

years are over, take my word for it.'

'Miss Beatrix!' in a tone of shrill scorn. 'Dear heart, just to think of comparing her with our Miss Dora! But you young gentlemen will be poking your fun at an old woman. Miss Beatrix indeed!'

'My fire is burning nicely now, Nurse,' observed Garth rather hastily. 'If you make me too comfortable I shall be afraid of coming here.'

'There's some folks would like to see you come oftener, sir; but it is not for me to tell young ladies' secrets,' and

then Nurse dropped her ancient curtsey and took her comely old person out of the room, while Garth, with a shrug and

sigh, proceeded to dress himself.

'Oh, my golden-haired Circe!' was his inward ejaculation, and then he wondered how Queenie would look in a velvet gown with some of that fine old lace round her long white throat. 'She can have no end of that sort of thing now,' he said to himself.

After all the gong sounded before he was ready; but Mr Cunningham received his excuses with good-humour, and dinner passed off with perfect tranquillity. It struck Garth that Beatrix was rather quiet and a trifle dull, and he had some difficulty in winning a look or response from her, but he soon desisted from his attempts. 'Poor child, she has been having a little sisterly lecture on forwardness, I expect. Dora is not likely to allow her to monopolise me,' and he bent with some secret amusement over his plate. He was reading his old friend Dora by a clearer light now.

But he soon forgot Beatrix when Dora began to talk in Dora was very brilliant and picturesque in her conversation when she chose. She gave Garth full descriptions of their places of sojourn in the Pyrenees. Now and then there were hints and touches of a softer character: had he thought of her spending long anxious days and nights in that great whitewashed ward in Brussels? why had he answered her letters so curtly, exiles were always so homesick and longing for news? did he remember her and Flo eating their solitary Christmas dinner in their odd little room, looking out on the snow-capped mountains? They had chestnut soup, and a broiled fowl, and a salad to follow, and Flo was longing all the time for a slice of turkey and some English plum-pudding, and he had never taken the trouble to tell her how they had passed the day at Church-Stile House. and so on.

It was all very graphic and interesting, and Garth took himself to task for a certain feeling of relief when Dora and her sisters had withdrawn, and the Vicar and he had plunged into their business talk.

He was half disposed to prolong it when the coffee was brought in, but, to his surprise, Flo made her appearance.

'Dora has sent me to look after the fire while papa takes his nap,' remarked Flo very coolly, as she produced her knitting and planted herself comfortably on the rug. 'Papa has had rheumatism very badly, and if the fire goes out and he wakes up chilly there is no knowing what will happen,' finished Flo, with a toss of her curly head that reminded him of Dora.

'My girls spoil me dreadfully,' observed Mr. Cunningham fondly. 'Don't let me keep you, Garth, we shall be in to tea presently,' and there was nothing but for Garth to

withdraw.

But his heart quailed within him when he entered the drawing-room, and found Dora seated alone by the fire, apparently doing nothing but toying with 'ittle screen.

'What has become of Beatrix!' he a. . at once, stopping

half-way and looking round for the girl.

'Bee has a letter that she must finish to-night, and will be down presently,' returned Dora carelessly; 'she is writing in the old schoolroom. You remember the schoolroom, do you not, and the cosy teas we have had there; we still keep it for the girls' use. I must get papa to do it up prettily for them next summer.'

'Couldn't she have left her letter until to-morrow?' asked Garth, half laughing, but the little subterfuge secretly displeased him. Why should Beatrix be banished to that dreary schoolroom? and why should Flo be sent to watch her father's slumbers? 'I don't like the look of this at all,' he muttered to himself, and again that allusion to Circe crossed his mind.

'Come and sit down,' exclaimed Dora, with playful petulance. 'Never mind Bee's whim, girls will have their own way, and she does not mean to be rude; and now tell me, sir, why you have been so cool all this time, and treated me so shabbily ?'

He was in for it now he saw, but he feigned to misunderstand her.

'How have I treated you shabbily?' he asked, with a tolerable assumption of innocence.

There was an ominous flash in Dora's blue eyes, but she answered him gently and plaintively.

'Why, in your letters, to be sure; they were as brief and

cold as possible, not a trace of the old friendship, not even a regret at my long absence. They deserved to be burnt, every one of them, but I hadn't the heart,' dropping her voice and looking at him with dangerous sweetness.

'I wish you had,' he returned coolly, for he was in no mood for this sort of thing. Another time all this might have pleased and allured him; he might have been faithful in his allegiance to Queenie, and yet have taken a certain pleasure in watching her and listening to her reproaches. She was such a picturesque little creature, and there was something so sweetly seductive in her manners to him, that he would not have been a man and not felt the power of her fascination; bu' the memory of his past tenderness for her was now a sour. I regret to him, and he was too much shattered by the storm that had swept over him to amuse himself with aimless love-making. 'I wish you would destroy all my letters, Miss Cunningham,' he went on gravely; and then he remembered that he had not yet told her about the failure of his fortunes.

He touched on it now, but lightly, and she listened with the deepest interest.

'Poor Mr. Clayton, how shocking to lose all that money! I am so grieved about it, and you never told me about that either!' with reproachful tenderness, and the mistiness, he had before noticed gathered slowly to her eyes.

'There is something else I have not told you,' he continued, taking his resolution suddenly, and determined to put a stop, at all risks, to this dangerous softness; 'but then, to be sure, I have only just known it myself. Have you heard that our schoolmistress, Miss Marriott, has come into a large fortune?'

'Why, no!' she returned, very much startled and becoming a little pale.

'It is a whim of hers hiding it from all of us as she has done. Why, she was a rich woman when you first made her acquaintance! I call it a tidy little fortune, five thousand a year.'

'Why has she hidden it? What has been her purpose?' she inquired, with a sudden sharpness in her tone that struck him directly, but he answered her carelessly.

'Oh, I don't know; some girlish nonsense or other, nothing at all to her discredit, rather the otherwise.' But he said no word about the loan. It was no business of Dora's; it was a matter simply between themselves, so he told himself.

But Dora's cheek had paled visibly. 'I thought you hated money and heiresses,' she said at last, very slowly, and looking him full in the face.

Garth flushed uneasily, the inference was too obvious.

'Did I say a word about hating or the reverse, Dora ?' he asked, in some displeasure. In his vexation he had called her Dora.

'I feared you had made up your mind never to call me that again,' she said, looking at him very gently. 'I have thought since,' hesitating and dropping her eyes, 'that I was wrong and foolish in what I said to you that night, and you were perfectly right in being angry with me. Couldn't you—haven't you forgiven me yet, Mr. Garth?'

Then he jumped up from his seat, and his face was full of pain. She was still his old friend and playmate, and how was he to misunderstand her? Was it forgiveness only for which she was asking, or was it a tacit permission for a renewal of his attentions? Either way, he must set things right between them now and for ever, for her sake, for his, and for Queenie's.

'Why are you so hard to me?' she asked again, and her blue eyes were still misty.

'Dora, my dear girl,' he said, and there was a certain warmth and affection in his tone, 'I am not hard with you, and I have forgiven you with all my heart. Perhaps I was a little angry with you once, men are such touchy creatures; but you did a very kind and wise thing for us both that night, and I thank you for it most truly, for you have saved us both, Dora, from a very great mistake.' And then he walked away from her, and took up his position by the fireplace.

Dora's pale cheeks were flaming now, but she made no attempt to answer him.

'I thought you were never coming, papa,' she said petulantly, when her father and Flo at that moment entered the room.

When Beatrix returned from her sojourn in the cold schoolroom she had a rebuke ready for her tardiness.

'I do not know what Mr. Clayton will think of such manners,' she said rather severely; but Beatrix only shrugged her shoulders and exchanged a droll glance with Flo.

'I am nearly starved with cold, and I should like some

tea, Dorrie,' she said very good-humouredly.

'I cannot have you sit in that cold schoolroom, my dear,' observed her father; 'there was my study, or Dora's writing-table in the front drawing-room, why could you not use that?'

'Never mind, this cup of tea will warm me,' returned

Beatrix, hugging herself and shivering.

Garth stirred the fire unasked, and brought her a low chair, and made her have a second cup of tea, waiting on her himself.

'And in that thin dress, too!' he remonstrated; 'you

ought to take better care of yourself, Beatrix.'

Beatrix looked up at him half grateful and half laughing. She wished she were not grown up, and she might ask him to chafe her cold hands as he used to do when she was a little girl. She remembered even now the comforting warmth of those strong, brown hands.

'Never mind, one day he will be my brother, and that will be nice,' thought Beatrix to herself. 'I wish he and Dorrie would settle it quickly between themselves, and then

there will be no more cold schoolrooms.'

Garth did not find another opportunity to exchange a word with Dora that night. The girls played some duets, and their sister turned the pages of their music for them, and left her father to entertain their visitor.

Nevertheless, the sense of her displeasure pervaded the atmosphere somehow, and drove all comfort from him. When he said good-night to her, she gave him a very fleeting pressure of the fingers, and scarcely lifted her eyes to his, but her mouth looked a little scornful.

But it was not Garth this time that passed a sleepless night. When Dora brushed out her golden hair a pale, set face met her eyes in the glass, with a very decided frown on the brow.

# QUEENIE'S WHIM

'He thinks to blind me, but I am not to be thrown aside in this sort of way,' she said to herself. 'He belongs to me, and she shall not have him.' And before she slept Dora took her resolution.

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## CHAPTER XLII

### 'HE BELONGS TO ME'

'Lor. You loved and he did love?

Mar. To say he did

Were to affirm what oft his eyes avouch'd,

What many an action testified, and yet

What wanted confirmation of his tongue.'—J. S. KNOWLES.

A FEW days after this Queenie was returning from afternoon school when Emmie met her at the door of the cottage with her finger on her lip and a general air of mystery about her.

'What is it, Emmie?' asked her sister somewhat wearily. 'Run in out of the cold air, darling, it is making you cough, I see.'

'Why is it so dreadfully cold, I wonder?' returned the child, shivering. 'The winter is over, and yet the wind seems to blow right through one. Who do you think is in there, Queen? actually Miss Cunningham. She has been sitting there nearly an hour, I believe.'

'Miss Cunningham!' unable to believe her ears; for Langley, with intentional kindness, had not informed her of

her return.

'Yes; Miss Cunningham. Oh!' dropping her voice to a whisper, 'she has tired me so. She is nice and pretty, and has blue eyes like our kitten's; but somehow I can't like her. She asked me such lots of questions all about Uncle Andrew and our being rich; but, do you know, I don't think she quite liked your lending Mr. Garth that money.'

'Oh, Emmie, you never told her that?' in such a horrified

voice that the child looked frightened.

'Was it such a great secret? I didn't know you would mind,' faltered Emmie; 'and she was saying such nice things about Mr. Garth.'

'Yes, it was a secret,' returned Queenie more calmly. 'Don't you remember we are not to let "our left hand know what our right hand doeth"? But never mind, it is done now,' for Emmie's eyes were already filling with tears at the notion of Queenie's displeasure. 'Run and tell Patience to have her kettle boiling; I daresay Miss Cunningham will like some tea.'

'May I stay and help Patience? there are some muffins, and I meant to toast them myself,' and, as Queenie nodded assent, Emmie stole down the little passage noiselessly and

shut herself up safely with Patience.

As Queenie walked into the room very erect and openeyed she did not fail to notice that Miss Cunningham had already made herself at home. Her sealskin jacket lay on the chair beside her, and her little furred gauntlets also. Her golden hair shone under her beaver hat; the dark closefitting dress suited her to a nicety. But as she came forward, holding out her hand, it struck Queenie that she looked somewhat pale, and that her smile was a little forced.

'What an age you have been,' observed Dora lightly. 'I have been sitting with Emmie nearly an hour, I believe. I thought you were never coming in, and then my long drive would have been in vain. I suppose Langley told you of my

return home ?'

'No; I was not aware of it,' rejoined Queenie; and now she felt a little surprise at Langley's omission.

Dora's delicate eyebrows arched themselves slightly.

'How very strange! and her brother was dining with us last week. He was our first visitor, of course,' with a meaning emphasis. 'The girls are so fond of him, and papa can do nothing without him, which makes it very pleasant for me. By the bye,' her manner changing abruptly, 'Mr. Clayton tells me that you have been only playing at schoolmistress all this time, Miss Marriott, and that you are in reality a woman of fortune.'

'Mr. Calcott has been good to me and left me all his money. I was poor, very poor, when I met you first,' her

heart sinking strangely at Dora's words. Why had she

begun to talk of Garth?

'When people do eccentric things they must expect to have all sorts of motives imputed to them. What will the world say, by the way, of your lending all that money to Mr. Clayton?' fixing her eyes a little too keenly on Queenie's face.

'It may say what it likes,' with the proudest possible manner, for she felt her spirit rising at this. What did it matter what the whole world said about her conduct, if only her conscience were clear? 'The world does not believe in a disinterested friendship,' a faint colour coming into her face; 'it would sneer at such an improbability.'

'I generally find the world is right,' returned Dora, with aggravating calmness. 'Of course it will say you are in love with Mr. Clayton; you are prepared for that, Miss Marriott.'

A painful blush overspread the girl's face.

'Oh, this is too bad,' she exclaimed, clasping her hands nervously. 'Cannot one do a little kindness in return for so much without having unworthy motives imputed to one? Why do you come and say such things to me?' turning on her tormentor with sudden anger and impatience. 'It is no business of yours; it is nothing to you if people will say untrue things of me.'

'You are quite wrong there; it is my business,' returned Dora quietly. She did not like her work, but, all the same, she must go through with it. 'It is just this—that is my business,' she repeated, and her face looked worn and irritable in the firelight. 'Miss Marriott, you must know—you cannot have been so much with Langley and Cathy and not know that Garth Clayton and I belong to each other.'

Then a sudden coldness crept over Queenie.

'You—you are not engaged to him,' she said at length, and her voice sounded strange to herself; the horror of such an announcement almost took her breath away. 'But it could not be true!' she said to herself, 'it could not be true!'

'It is my own fault that we are not engaged,' returned Dora, speaking in a tone of plaintive regret. 'I have put him off time after time, and would not allow him to settle

it; the girls were too young, and I could not leave papa, that was what I told him. Why, just before I went to Brussels last autumn he came to us, and wanted me then to settle it, poor fellow, and I would not listen to him.'

'He spoke to you then?' the numbness creeping over her

again.

'Yes; he said it must be yes or no between us—I remember his words quite well—and when I would not give him a positive answer he got angry and left me. He has never been himself with me since, and has made me, oh, so unhappy; but I know the reason for it now, Miss Marriott,' fixing her blue eyes piteously on her. 'Why have you come between us and tried to steal away his heart from poor me?'

'Miss Cunningham!' her cheeks burning at the accusation.

'Why have you lent him all that money, and tried to decoy his affections? He is not the same to me, and you are the cause. We are two women, and he cannot marry us both; and—and he belongs to me,' finished Dora, with a genuine quiver in her voice.

Poor bewildered Queenie could make nothing of it.

'He cannot belong to you if you are not engaged to him, and if you have sent him from you,' she said, looking help-lessly at Dora; and indeed she was so heartsick and stupefied that she hardly knew what she said. If he had spoken to Dora, as she averred, how could he have come and looked at her the next night in the way he did, when she knelt on the rug, with the plate of cakes in her hand, in the gloaming?

'It was duty, not I, that sent him away, he owns that,' returned Dora, sighing, but her conscience smote her as she

uttered this little fib.

Had he not striven to show her that her motives of duty had been overstrained and false in his eyes? 'If you send me away you may find it difficult to recall me, Dora,' he had said to her. Was not that asserting his right to be free?

- 'I went too far that time,' she went on, 'and made him angry and bitter; but that would not have mattered if you had not come between us.'
  - 'I-I have done nothing. What do you mean?'
  - 'He was angry with me, and then he came to you; and,

to be sure, how can he help seeing that you care for him after all you have done?

'Hush! I will not hear another word; you are going too far. How dare you?' exclaimed Queenie passionately, moved to sudden anger at this ungenerous thrust. 'You have no right to come here and say these things to me.'

'No right!' returned Dora meekly; she had quailed a little before the brown fire of Queenie's eyes. 'Have I no right when I have known and cared for him all my life! I am nearly eight-and-twenty now, and I was not more than sixteen—Flo's age—when this was first thought of between us; why, we had been meant for each other ever since we were children, and yet, after twelve years of thorough understanding, you say I have no right to speak!'

'I—I do not understand,' began Queenie vaguely, and her

cheek turned very white.

What if all this were true, and he had grown weary of this youthful entanglement? Might it not be possible that he and Dora had grown apart, that the tie had loosened between them, and that, in reality, his second love was the true one? Alas! the instincts of her own pure heart verified this view of the case; she understood him so thoroughly, she was so sure of his integrity, but what proof or evidence of her belief could she offer Dora? He had never spoken to her, his looks indeed had betrayed his secret, and hitherto their eloquence had sufficed her; but, at a crisis like this, the sense of his silence was dreadful; her faith was involuntarily built up on no foundation. After all Dora was right, and she had no claim to him.

'I was sure you did not understand,' returned Dora, watching her, and speaking with the utmost gentleness. 'You are too generous to take him from me, who have loved him all these years. I knew I had only to speak to you and all would be right between us.'

'Stop!' exclaimed Queenie in an unnatural voice. 'You may be mistaken, Mr. Clayton has never spoken to me, it may not be as you think; but, on the other hand,' growing whiter still, 'I would scorn to deceive you, and I have thought—but I may be wrong—that he has seemed to care for me.

I would not have said so much, but you have more than once

hinted at my forwardness.'

'Yes; but it has been only seeming,' replied Dora softly; 'he could not really have changed to me, you know. If you would only go away and leave us to come together it would soon be right again.'

'You want me to go away ?' asked Queenie slowly.

'Not for long—only for a few months, till he has got over his fancy, and come back to me. I don't want to hurt you, dear Miss Marriott, or to make you angry again, but if you knew how soon men find out these sort of things! Of course you thought it was gratitude and friendship, but he was wiser, and knew better than that; and when I made him angry he thought it very likely that you would console him.'

'You have said enough,' replied Queenie in the same constrained tone. 'You will not have long to bear with my presence; I have already made up my mind not to remain in

Hepshaw.'

'And when shall you leave ?' asked Dora eagerly.

'I—I don't know; in another month or two. I suppose there is nothing to keep me here now.'

But this vague promise was not sufficient for Dora.

'Why do you not go at once?' she persisted. 'You will think I am in a hurry to get rid of you, but that is not the only reason,' hesitating.

She was deliberately breaking Queenie's heart, and she knew it, in spite of the girl's assumed quietness; but somehow

she shrank from imposing this fresh pain.

'Surely, my dear Miss Marriott, now that you have nothing to bind you here you will not think of exposing that delicate

little sister of yours to our March winds?'

'What do you mean?' asked Queenie sharply; 'you are talking about yourself, not Emmie. What has Emmie to do with it,' shivering again as though some cold air had passed over her. And, strange to say, Dora grew suddenly softhearted over the effect of her words, for had she not a young sister too, and had not Flo been given back to her from the very grave itself?

'I wish you would not look so unhappy,' she went on. 'I have not seen her for some months, and of course the change

struck me, growing children often look thin; and then she is still weak from that long illness. Why don't you ask Dr. Stewart about her? he will tell you what to do; but of course you have had some advice?

'I have had no advice. Emmie is not ill. Why do you come here to make me so miserable?' returned Queenie, fixing her large eyes on her with such a mournful expression that

Dora got quite uncomfortable.

'She only wants a tonic perhaps, but I should speak to Dr. Stewart; and, indeed, a cold spring would be very bad for her,' repeated Dora earnestly, as she drew on her furred gloves. Her conscience was very uncomfortable as she stood smoothing down the soft sealskin, trying to find some word that she might say at parting.

Queenie did not help her. She watched her with grave unsmiling eyes as Dora made her little preparations. When Dora again held out her hand to her she touched it rather

reluctantly.

'Good-bye; I hope you will not bear me malice, Miss Marriott.'

'I never bear any one malice; but you have made me very unhappy about Emmie,' returned Queenie, but her voice was quite steady as she spoke. What if her heart were breaking within her, Dora should never know it.

But when the door closed upon her visitor, and Emmie crept softly back into the room, her fortitude suddenly gave

way.

'Come to me, Emmie; come here, my darling,' and as the child obeyed her wonderingly, she held out her arms with a sudden sob.

You are not ill, are you, Emmie? What do they mean by making me so unhappy? They say you are thin and

weak; but there is nothing the matter, is there?'

'I don't know,' faltered the child, resting her fair head on her sister's shoulder. 'I think I am only tired, Queenie. Ought people to be so very, very tired, and to have their bones always aching ?'

'That is because you are not strong, my precious.' But somehow, as Queenie uttered the words, the conviction seized on her that Dora was right, and the child was certainly thinner and lighter; and such an intolerable feeling of agony came over her at the thought that she could not bear it.

'Oh, my darling, forgive me!' she sobbed, kissing the

little pale face passionately.

'Forgive you! What do you mean? What makes you

cry so bitterly, Queen?'

'Forgive me. I was too wrapped up in myself to notice. I never meant to neglect you, Emmie, never. What does my happiness or unhappiness matter if I can only keep you with me, my blessing ?'

'Shall you want to keep me if I get too dreadfully tired ?' she asked languidly. 'Don't cry any more, Queen, I will stop just as long as I can.' But Queenie only shivered afresh

and dried her eyes.

'Sit by the fire, darling,' she said, trying to return to her usual manner. 'Patience shall give you your tea. I shall not be very long, Emmie.'

'Are you going out again?' in a disappointed tone. 'The muffins are all ready, and I thought we should be so cosy this

evening.'

'I shall not be long,' repeated her sister hastily.

She knew she could not have swallowed food in her present state of suspense, and before Emmie could again remonstrate she had left the cottage, and was on the way to Juniper Lodge.

She found Dr. Stewart in his surgery. She fancied he

listened a little gravely to her account.

'She has not come under my notice for the last six or seven weeks,' he said, as he prepared, at Queenie's urgent request, to accompany her. 'In my opinion she has always been a delicate child. Such an illness as you have described may leave its effects for years.'

As they entered the parlour they found Emmie stretched on the rug as usual, and this time Queenie's heart sank within

her at the sight.

'Oh, Emmie, you are not tired again?' she said, almost impatiently, for she feared that this would impress Dr. Stewart unfavourably; but he apparently took no notice. He watched the child with keen attention as she roused herself somewhat feebly, and came towards them.

'Has Queenie asked you to make me less tired?' she demanded gravely, fixing her blue eyes on his face.

'Young creatures like you ought never to be tired,' he answered cheerfully. 'Do you often lie down in this fashion, eh?'

'I lie down because my bones ache, and I have such an

odd, funny feeling sometimes.'

And then, as Dr. Stewart questioned her jokingly about the feelings, she told him in her childish way of all manner of strange fancies and dreams that troubled her, and of the queer faintness that came over her at times; and how her cough began to hurt her; and how she got more tired and good for nothing every day.

Dr. Stewart's face grew graver as he listened. When he had finished a most careful examination of the child he sat for a little while in silence, while Queenie watched him anxiously.

'I am afraid he thinks Emmie very delicate,' she said to herself. But she little knew Dr. Stewart's thoughts at that moment.

'If she had called me in earlier I could have done nothing,' he thought. 'The child is in a rapid decline. I wonder if it would be more merciful to tell her so at once, or to let her find it out gradually for herself?' And being a very tender-hearted man, he inclined to the latter course.

So when Emmie had been sent away on some errand, and Queenie began her anxious questioning, he answered her evasively.

'Do you think her very ill? ought I to have sent for you before, Dr. Stewart?'

'Well, no; I don't see what I could have done. Of course the child is very delicate—in a very bad state of health I should say; she is very fanciful and morbid too, all these imaginative children are. You must rouse her and keep her cheerful.'

'But was Miss Cunningham right? will the cold spring hurt her?'

'Ah, that is just what I was going to say. I don't think our northern climate agrees with her, it is too strong and bracing. You are your own mistress, why don't you take her south? Any watering-place would do—Torquay, or Bourne-

mouth, or even St. Leonards. The change may give her a few more months,' he said to himself.

'Sea air! is that what she needs?' asked Queenie, with a sudden dawning of hope in her face.

Dr. Stewart shifted uneasily on his seat, and did not look

at her as he answered.

'Well, one should always make use of every possible remedy; and of course another month of these cold winds will kill her, there is no doubt of that.'

'I will go at once; we will start immediately,' almost

gasped Queenie.

I should do so by all means. If you like, I will speak to Mr. Logan on my way home, and see if he cannot, temporarily at least, fill up your place. There was a young person Faith mentioned who would be very likely to suit. Shall I manage this for you, eh?

'I shall be greatly obliged if you will,' she answered

gratefully.

'Then about the place, where will you decide on going? There's a friend of mine, a doctor, a sort of connection of ours, living at St. Leonards; he and his wife are very good people. If you thought of going there I would write to Bennet, and he would look after Miss Emmie.'

'I think I would rather go there, then; it will feel less lonely if Dr. Bennet is a friend of yours,' a sudden terrible

sense of isolation and banishment coming over her.

'Very well, then, we will decide on St. Leonards, and I will ask them to look out some cheerful apartments for you. You are not particular about price, I daresay; and I can rely on his wife's choice. She is a very good homely body, and will be a great comfort to you—when the child gets worse,' he added to himself.

'When ought we to go?' she asked in a low voice, feeling

all at once as though Fate were too strong for her.

'Humph! well, suppose we say in a week from now. I will talk to Mr. Logan, and I daresay we can find somebody to take the cottage off your hands. The less leavetaking and fuss the better in such a case, don't you think so, eh?'

'If Mr. Logan releases me there will be no difficulty about anything else,' she returned quietly, and Dr. Stewart was

charmed with her good sense and reasonableness. She forced herself into seeming cheerfulness when the child returned, and they sat down at last to their long-delayed meal. When they had finished she beckoned Emmie to the stool at her feet.

'Darling, are you glad?' she began. 'Dr. Stewart says that I must take you away to the sea, nothing else will make you strong.'

'Does he say the sea will make me strong?' asked Emmie

curiously, 'are you sure that he said that, Queen ?'

'He said these cold winds will kill you,' returned Queenie, shuddering, 'and that was enough for me. You will not fret at going away, Emmie, we shall be together, and do all sorts of nice things all day long; and when the summer comes, and you are strong again, we can come back here and see all our kind friends.'

'I hope the summer will not be too long in coming, then,' she returned dubiously. 'Oh! I wish we had not to leave this dear place, it will be so sad parting with Langley and dear Mr. Garth, and Captain Fawcett, and Miss Cosie, and every one.'

'Yes; but it will only be for a little time,' returned her sister persuasively, for the child's voice was full of sadness. 'Don't you remember, darling, that happy summer at Morecombe Bay, when dear father was alive, and how he helped us to make castles on the sand? you were such a little child then, but so strong and merry.'

'I think I remember a little bit of it, and how the waves

used to sing me to sleep.'

'Yes; and we shall hear the grand old lullaby again. Now listen to me, Emmie, and I will tell you what we will do, you and I. We will go to a grand hotel in London,—we are rich people now, you know,—and we will send for Cathy, and make her spend a long day with us.'

'Oh, that will be nice,' exclaimed Emmie, clapping her hands in her old way. 'And shall we have a bright sunny room with a great bow-window looking over the sea, as the rich people had at Morecombe Bay? and shall we ever be able to drive out in a pony carriage?'

'I will hire the prettiest pony carriage I can find,' returned

Queenie, feeling now the value of riches. 'You shall have everything you wish for, Emmie—books and toys, and all manner of good things—if only you will be happy with me and not fret.'

'Of course I shall be happy with you,' exclaimed the child, throwing herself into her sister's arms. 'What was it Ruth said? "Whither thou goest I will go." I always think of you when I read that. We have been playing at being poor, and now we must play at being rich. Oh, it will be such fun!' finished Emmie rather wearily, and Queenie kissed the heavy eyes and said no more.

## CHAPTER XLIII

'WHY DOES HE NOT COME AND SEE US !'

"It is not hard to die," She said, with that fair smile, "for God's sweet will Makes bitter things most sweet. In my bright youth He calls me to His side. It is not hard To go to Him."—*Ezekiel and other Poems*.

FRIENDS came around Queenie in her trouble. In her letter to Cathy she compared herself, somewhat quaintly, to Job when all his acquaintance comforted him. For after the first few hours of stupefied misery that followed her conversation with Dr. Stewart and Dora, her natural courage had returned; the pain was crushed resolutely into the background. Her every thought must be for Emmie; her one care to retrieve the effects of her unintentional neglect.

The cottage all at once became the centre of interest to all

the good Hepshaw folks.

Captain Fawcett could scarcely bear the child out of his sight, and his wife's sorrow at the impending parting was a grievous thing to see; while Miss Cosie trotted in and out perpetually, on all manner of self-invented errands.

And Langley came, saying little, but expressing a whole world of silent tenderness in her face and manner; and Faith Stewart, with her quiet, helpful ways, bringing an atmosphere

of rest and peace to poor harassed Queenie.

One day Mr. Chester came, but his visit was a sadly trying one. He wrung Queenie's hand for some moments without speaking, and for a long time he could not bring himself to mention the subject of her departure.

'You were so good to me when my darling died. I wish I could do something to help you,' he said huskily; 'but then my poor Gertie is dying, and I cannot leave her for more than an hour or two,' and the sympathy of this open-hearted man almost broke Queenie down.

One afternoon she went to say good-bye to Miss Charity. Miss Charity looked up at her with her bright sharp eyes

very keenly.

'Ah, well, being a rich woman doesn't seem to suit you,' she said, not unkindly. 'You are not half as blithe and bonny-looking as when you first came to Hepshaw.'

'I am so anxious about Emmie,' replied Queenie hastily, for any comment on her changed looks made her uncomfort-

able. 'You see, Emmie is all I have, Miss Charity.'

'Ah, well, the widow's mite was worth all the rich men's offerings,' returned the invalid with a sigh. 'Never hold what you have got with both hands, because then it is harder to let go. I thought I should have died of sheer grief when my back got bad, and poor George had to give me up; but I thought better of it, and here I am, and here I shall be, till my lessons are all done, and I am perfect through patience,' finished Miss Charity, with a tear twinkling on her eyelashes.

But the one friend for whose coming she looked daily, for whose voice and presence and sympathy she craved with a longing that surprised herself, never crossed the threshold of

the cottage.

For some reason only known to himself Garth Clayton held himself aloof.

It was not until after morning service on Sunday that Queenie found herself face to face with him in the plane-tree walk. He was with Ted and Langley, but after a moment's hesitation he left them and came up to her.

'You are leaving us, I hear,' he said, rather abruptly, and Queenie could see he was exceedingly nervous, 'and I am much grieved at the cause; but I have great faith in sea air. I hope—at least I trust—that Emmie may benefit by it.'

'Dr. Stewart says it is the only thing for her. Have you seen him? Has he given you his opinion about her?' fixing her dark eyes rather searchingly on his face. Dr. Stewart's ambiguity was causing her some uneasiness. 'I wish that he

—that some one—would speak plainly to me, and tell me what he really thinks about Emmie.'

'Well, you see, doctors are rather difficult people to deal with,' returned Garth evasively, but his tone was very gentle. 'You must not lose heart about it, you know, children are often very ill. This cold wind is making you shiver, I must not keep you now; I will come over to the cottage to bid you and Emmie "Good-bye," 'and then he smiled at her and went back to his sister.

Queenie had arranged to go over to Carlisle the next day to pay a parting visit to Caleb and Molly. All her affairs were now arranged; Mr. Logan had found a temporary mistress in a young widow, a protégée of Faith Stewart's, who was lodging in Hepshaw with her little girl, and was in search of some employment. And Emmie, who had taken a fancy to Mrs. Henfrey's little girl, proposed that they should live in the cottage, 'At least take care of it until we come back,' to which Queenie, desirous of gratifying the child's most trifling whim, willingly acceded. A bitter disappointment awaited Queenie on her return from Carlisle.

'Oh, dear, you will be so sorry!' Emmie exclaimed, running to her as she entered the cottage, feeling weary and dispirited. 'Langley and Mr. Garth have been here, and he has left you a message, because he is going away and will not see you again; and he did seem so sorry about it.'

'Going away!' repeated Queenie in a low voice, and then she sat down. She felt all at once so strangely tired.

'Yes; I heard him tell Langley that he must take the seven o'clock train, so he has gone long ago now. Some uncle of theirs is ill, I think they said he lived at Perth; but anyhow he sent for Mr. Garth in a great hurry.'

'And what was his message, Emmie?' putting up her hand to her head, as though conscious of some numb pain.

'Well, he told me to say how sorry he was to miss you and not to say good-bye, and that you were not to lose heart about things; and oh—yes, he told me that twice over, that he hoped if you were in any trouble or perplexity that you would write to him or Langley, for they would do anything to help you. And he kissed me half a dozen times I am sure!' with a triumphant air; 'and then Langley

said they must go, and he got up very slowly and went

away.'

'Oh, it is too hard! it is more than I can bear!' broke from Queenie's pale lips when she was alone with her thoughts that night. 'To leave for months, for ever, perhaps, and never to wish him good-bye, not even a word or look to treasure up in my memory.' And for a long time she wept bitterly.

But by and by she became more reasonable. 'It is wrong of me, I ought not to wish to see him if he belongs to Dora. Perhaps it is better so, after all.' But, nevertheless, the bitterness of that disappointment abided with her for many a long

day.

When Langley wrote to her brother she spoke very briefly of the leavetaking. 'Ted and I saw them off, and Mr. Logan was with us. Emmie clung to us and cried a good deal, but Miss Marriott was very quiet, and scarcely spoke. She begged me to thank you for your message, and regretted that she had not seen you, that was all.'

Garth sighed over this brief message, but he understood Queenie's reticence perfectly. 'So they are gone, and the happy Brierwood Cottage days are over,' he said to himself, as he sat in the dim sickroom, revolving many things in his

mind.

Queenie had a dreary journey. Emmie was so exhausted with excitement and emotion that she slept the greater part of the way, and left her sister in perfect freedom to indulge in all manner of sad thoughts.

Queenie never recalled that day without a shudder. A sadness, indescribable but profound, weighed down her spirits—a feeling of intolerable desolation and loneliness as hour after hour passed on, and the distance lengthened between her and the friends whom she had grown to love.

'Who knows if it may not be good-bye for ever to that dear place?' she thought, 'for if he marries Dora I will never

willingly see his face again.'

She was thankful when Emmie at last woke up, to find herself at their journey's end. Emmie, whose imagination had been vividly aroused by the idea of the magnificence that awaited them, was rather disappointed by the quiet, old-fashioned hotel to which Dr. Stewart had recommended them.

It was just the reverse of grand, she thought, but the sight of the bright, cheerful-looking room into which the weary travellers were ushered speedily reconciled her, and she was soon comfortably ensconced on the great couch, contentedly watching Queenie as she cut up her chicken.

'Now, Emmie, you must eat that and then go to bed,' said her sister decisively, as she carried the tempting tray to the sofa, and Emmie was far too weary and docile to resist.

They were to spend two days in London, but the first few hours hung rather heavily on Queenie's hands. Emmie was fit for nothing but sleep, and could not rouse herself to take interest in anything, and Queenie did not care to leave her or to encounter the crowded streets alone. She spent the greater part of the day sitting idly at the window with her hands on her lap, watching the passers-by with vague, unseeing eyes, and living over every episode of their Hepshaw life.

The next day was better, for Cathy came to them, and the sight of her bright face roused Queenie from her despondency.

'What do you mean by misbehaving like this, Emmie ?' she said, as she knelt down by the sofa, and took the child in her arms. 'Here you are getting ill again and making every one unhappy.'

'I couldn't help it, Cathy,' returned the child earnestly.
'Oh, how good it is to see your dear face again, and how nice you look in that black stuff gown; and do you always wear a

funny little close bonnet like that ?'

'This is Nurse Catherine's costume,' replied Cathy, laughing and blushing and looking very handsome. 'What do you think Mr. Logan would say to it! and oh, my dear Madam Dignity, how worn and pale you are!'

'It is nothing, I am quite well. Tell me about yourself,' returned Queenie, looking fondly at her old chum. 'Do you

still like your work? does it agree with you?'

'My work is making a woman of me. Did you ever see me look better, Queen?' And indeed Queenie was driven to confess that she had never seen Cathy look more restful and satisfied.

They had a long, quiet-toned conversation while Emmie dozed in the afternoon. Cathy did not talk much about Emmie. 'She was delicate and needed the greatest care,'

that was all she would allow, but she was voluble on the subject of the loan, and almost overwhelmed her friend with

her delighted gratitude.

'He will get on now, dear old fellow, and it is all owing to you,' exclaimed the affectionate girl, and somehow Queenie's sore heart felt a little lighter. But on her own affairs Cathy was still very reticent. 'I don't know what I am going to do, I have not made up my mind. I shall stay on here and work for a time, I suppose,' and then her colour deepened, and she broke off rather suddenly.

But later on, as the three sat cosily round the fire and talked of their old feasts in the garret, and Emmie clapped her hands and laughed feebly over many a droll reminiscence, Queenie noticed that now and then the keen grey eyes were full of tears, and that she would look at her and the child

rather strangely.

'Good-bye, God bless you both; and keep up a good heart, Queen,' was all she said when she left them that night. But when she re-entered the hospital an hour later more than one patient noticed Nurse Catherine's eyes were red, as though she

had been weeping.

It was somewhat late the following afternoon when they drove into St. Leonards and took possession of their new abode. Emmie uttered an exclamation of delight as she looked round the large luxurious room prepared for their reception. A bright fire burnt cheerily, a trim maidservant was spreading a snowy cloth over the little round table; the great crimson couch was drawn invitingly near the hearth, outside the pier light twinkled, and a windy flicker of lamps flared from the esplanade, while the deep wash and surge of the monotonous waves broke softly on her ears.

'Oh, Queenie, how homelike and delicious it looks! and

oh, what beautiful flowers!'

'Mrs. Bennet must have sent these,' returned Queenie gratefully, as she carried the delicate spring bouquet of violets and snowdrops to Emmie. 'I am so glad you are pleased with our new home, darling. Look, there is the bay-window you wanted, and behind those folding doors is our bedroom. Mrs. Bennet thought it would be quiet and snug, and there would be no tiresome stairs for you to climb.'

'I am sure Mrs. Bennet must be very nice,' was Emmie's answer, and then, as she seemed exhausted and disposed to close her eyes, Queenie prudently left her to repose.

Emmie's favourable opinion of their new acquaintance was soon verified, for the Bennets called the next day, and quite won the sisters' hearts by their geniality and unobtrusive kindness. Dr. Bennet was a little bluff and hasty in manner at first, but as this wore off he and Emmie became excellent friends. His wife was a quiet, motherly-looking woman, and Emmie took a fancy to her on the spot.

'Isn't she just like dear Miss Cosie, Queen, with those grey curls and that comfortable soft voice; if she would only say, "There, there, poor dear," as Miss Cosie always does,' finished the child with a quaint smile.

It was a strange new life that began for Queenie. The links that united her to the old had been suddenly snapped asunder, and she had drifted away into a quiet changeless existence, which seemed almost as unreal as a dream.

It was as though she had no separate individuality or life of her own; her only existence was Emmie, her one thought from morning to night how to gratify the child's capricious whims.

When Emmie opened her eyes on waking she always saw her sister by her bedside; she would stoop over and touch her lips with the fresh, dewy flowers she had in her hand—violets or primroses, or, later on, lilies of the valley and fragrant tea-roses. Emmie loved the roses best.

'I have been out for my morning walk, and look what I have brought you!' Queenie would say. It was always so, always the same surprise, the same sweet morning greeting, the same loving smile; and so it was through the day.

Strangers began to comment on the tall, graceful girl who drove out her little sister day after day in the pony-carriage, or, as Emmie's strength failed, walked by the side of the bath-chair, where the little frail figure seemed to be lost and hidden. How Emmie loved to watch the ships and the little brown fishing-smacks! The shifting groups on the esplanade pleased and amused her; the music on the pier charmed her. As the daylight faded away, and the waves grew solemn and grey in the twilight, she would lie on her couch contentedly

for hours, while Queenie read or sang to her and told her the

simple tales of her own production.

'I never dared to think; I just prayed, and so my little stock of daily strength was replenished, like the widow's cruse,' Queenie said very simply long afterwards to one who questioned her of that sad summer. 'Life just then meant Emmie to me, and nothing else.'

It was true; she never dared to think. Week by week and month by month the brave-hearted girl crushed down the dull aching pain of weary suspense and doubt; month by month she bore the loneliness of that sad watching, with the end plainly before her, and yet no complaint of her bitter load of trouble harassed the kind hearts of the friends she had left.

Very brief and touching were her few letters to Langley; but they told little save the record of their daily life—'Emmie

was no better, or a little weaker,' and that was all.

One day, about two months after they had been settled at St. Leonards, a letter came from Garth. The sight of the handwriting made Queenie tremble with sudden emotion; but her face soon paled and saddened as she read it.

It was brief, but kind, and had evidently been written with great care. It spoke of the death of their uncle, who was almost a stranger to his nephews and nieces, but who had taken a fancy to Garth in his last illness and had left him his little all.

'It is not a great fortune,' wrote Garth, 'it is something less than two or three thousand pounds; but it has quite replaced my unfortunate Bank loss. We are all more thankful than we can say. It makes me especially happy, because I can now repay you the loan you have so generously advanced to me without any further delay. As I am anxious to settle this matter at once, I shall be glad if you will let me know into whose hands I am to pay the money.' And then followed a few kind inquiries after her and Emmie.

Poor Queenie, her answer was very stiff and cold. 'How pleased he is to be quit of his obligation to me. How the thought of this debt has galled and harassed him,' she thought, as she slowly and laboriously penned those few words. Garth's face grew puzzled and pained as he read them. It

is not always easy to read between the lines.

But as the summer wore on, Queenie grew graver and sadder, for even to her loving eyes Emmie was slowly but surely fading away.

The change had come on imperceptibly: first the drives in the pony-carriage were discontinued, then the bath-chair was found too fatiguing; by and by Queenie lifted the child's light form and carried it morning after morning to the couch in the bay-window. There was no question of even walking from one room to another. At the smallest exertion there were long fainting fits that drove Queenie almost frantic with alarm.

'Oh, if only Langley or Cathy could be with me now!' was her one wish. But, alas! there was no hope of this.

She knew there was a troubled household at Church-Stile House. Langley was ill, and Cathy had been summoned home to tend her sister. The long nursing at Karldale Grange had broken down her strength, and as soon as Gertrude Chester had drawn her last breath there had been a sudden collapse that had alarmed her brother.

'She was slightly better, but in a frightfully weak state,' Cathy wrote, 'and likely to remain so for some time, Dr. Stewart said, and so there was nothing for it but for her to relinquish her hospital work and come home.'

'Dr. Stewart calls us the model nurse and patient; and, indeed, Langley is such a patient creature that it is a pleasure to fend for her, as folk say,' Cathy wrote. 'Poor old Garth took her illness sadly to heart, but after Dr. Stewart's last visit he has seemed more cheerful; and so, you see, why you must do without your Church-Stile House friend, my dear Queenie, though I am longing from morning to night for a peep at you and Emmie.'

Queenie kept the contents of this letter to herself; it would never do to harass the child's mind with any fresh anxiety, so she answered all her questions cheerfully, though with some necessary evasion. 'Cathy had gone home, and Langley was overtired and far from strong,' that was all she told her.

For Emmie's spirits were drooping with her strength. All manner of anxious thoughts seemed brooding in the childish brain.

'What ails you, darling! What are you thinking about!' Queenie would ask her anxiously, but for many days she would not answer.

But one evening as she was lying on her couch, watching the rosy gleam on the water fade into grey silvery streaks, while the soft musical wash of the waves seemed to lull her restlessness for a little, she suddenly stretched out her thin arm and drew her sister's head down to the pillow.

'Rest there a few minutes, Queen, you are so tired, and I want to talk to you. Doesn't the moon look lovely shining through the clouds! How many evenings do you think you

and I will have together?'

'Hush, Emmie; only God knows, not you nor I.'

'When He says, "Come," I must go, mustn't I, Queen!'

'Oh yes, my darling!'

'I am so tired that I shall not mind going. I have almost forgotten what it is to run about and play as other children do. I think it will be nice to lie down and go sliding through the clouds like that girl in the picture, and then when I wake up there will be Nan and Alice, and Uncle Andrew and mamma. Oh, how nice to see mamma again!'

'Nice to leave me, darling?' trying to restrain a sob.

'Ah, that is the only sorrowful part,' returned the child, pressing Queenie's head between her weak arms. 'Oh, my Queen! my Queen! what will you do without me?' and for a short time the sisters clung to each other, unable to speak.

Queenie was the first to recover herself.

'Never mind, Emmie; you must not fret; God will take care of me.'

'Yes, I know, but I cannot help fretting. You look so sad and altered somehow, and all the light has gone out of your dear beautiful eyes; you are so good to me, and you smile and try to be cheerful, but I know—I know all about it, Queen.'

'You know what, my precious?'

- 'Why, I know how lonely you are, and how you miss them all. When I go away,' rather timidly, 'won't Mr. Garth come and take care of you?'
- 'Emmie, my darling, what has put such a notion into your head?'

'Isn't it true then?' half crying. 'I thought you were fond of him, and liked him better than any one else. Wasn't he the prince in your stories? he was always dark-haired, and tall, and strong, and that made me think of Mr. Garth.'

In the dim light a hot flush passed over Queenie's wan

face; Emmie softly stroked it with her trembling fingers.

'Ah, you will not answer; but I know all about it. I am only a child, but I love Mr. Garth dearly, dearly. Why doesn't he come and see us, Queen? haven't you told him I am ill?'

'Yes; he knows it,' almost inaudibly.

'Then why does he not come?' she persisted. 'If I were not tired I would write to him myself; do you think I could?'

'Not just now, by and by,' she replied, hardly thinking of what she was saying, and trying only to quiet her; and Emmie, satisfied with this vague permission, nestled against her sister contentedly, and said no more.

## CHAPTER XLIV

### 'EMMIE'S LETTER'

'I cannot take that anguish'd look to wear
On my calm heart in heaven, as my last,
Last memory of thee until we meet.
Nay, thou must smile on me; one little smile
Cast like a wild-flower on my misty way
Will make it brighter, and I cannot go
In peace until thou bless me.'—Kzekiel and other Poems.

EMMIE'S closing remarks that night had left no distinct impression on her sister's mind; but Queenie had little idea of the tenacity with which the child brooded over the matter, or how the weary young brain confused itself with endless plans and plotting. That some one must take care of Queenie, that was her one thought.

And so one morning, when Queenie had softly crept out of her room, thinking Emmie's closed eyelids betokened sleep, and had started for her fresh morning walk, the child painfully and slowly dragged herself from her bed, and with failing breath, and hands that trembled over their task, penned the pitiful little letter that wrung Garth's heart as he read it.

Queenie found her on her return lying wan and exhausted on her pillow, and bent over her with undisguised anxiety.

'Where is Harriet, darling? She ought not to have neglected you in this way,' she exclaimed in distress, putting back the curls from the child's damp forehead.

Emmie only closed her eyes in answer, but an odd little smile hovered round her lips. She knew that Harriet was

that moment walking down the esplanade, towards the red pillar-box on the green.

And this was the letter that Garth read and handed to Langley with undisguised emotion, and over which Langley cried until her feeble strength was nearly exhausted.

'Dear Mr. Garth,' it began, 'you are such a long way off—you and Langley and Cathy, and we never hear from you now; and Queenie has left off talking about you, and has taken to sighing instead; and I want so badly to see you, and have a long, long talk. If you knew how badly, I am sure you would come.

'I don't think people ever die without saying good-bye to their friends, and I want to bid you good-bye, and ask you to take care of Queenie. Some one must take care of her, you know; and I like you so much, dear Mr. Garth; and I think no one will be so good and kind to her as you would be.

'Queenie does not know that I am writing this; she has gone out to buy me some roses. She is doing something for me from morning to night, but I am sure it would make you sad to see her. She never smiles now, and her eyes are always full of tears. She is thinking of the time when she will be missing me. It will be soon now, for I get more tired every day.

'Do come, my dear, dear Mr. Garth. I think I like you next best to any one in the world but Queenie, except perhaps Langley and Cathy. Do come, please, to your loving and tired little EMMIE.'

Queenie was sadly disturbed by the child's restlessness during that day and the next; all her sweet placidity seemed gone. She was feverish and eager; it was difficult to soothe her. She started at every sound; an opening door, even the stoppage of vehicles in the street, would bring the flush to her white face, and she would sit up among her pillows, palpitating and expectant.

'What is it, Emmie, darling? What is the matter?'

Queenie would say to her over and over again.

'Oh, it is nothing; I am only very silly,' the child would answer, sinking back with a disappointed face. Of course her letter had not reached him, it was such a long, long way off. How was it possible for him to come yet? And then a new fear tormented her. If he delayed at all, if he took a

long time to think about it, would he be in time?

It was on the evening of the second day when this fresh thought began to harass her. The day had been hot and thundery, and she had suffered much from the oppression of the atmosphere. When Dr. Bennet saw her that night he let fall a word or two that stirred Queenie's numb pain to sharp, positive agony.

'You think she is worse, Dr. Bennet! I can read it in your face,' she asked, her poor hands working with the effort

to keep calm.

'I think there is a change of some sort; you must be prepared for anything now, my dear Miss Marriott. Poor little soul, one cannot wish her to suffer,' continued the warmhearted doctor, who had daughters of his own.

'No; I do not wish her to suffer, God forbid that I should be so selfish; but oh, Emmie!' and then she turned away, lest the bitter flood of her sorrow should overwhelm her. There would be time enough to weep when her work was finished; she needed all her strength for Emmie now.

But that night there was no sleep for her eyes. Hour after hour she sat beside the failing child; fanning her softly, watching her through her short intervals of sleep, and

listening to the dull lapping of the waves on the sand.

Once she dozed off and lost herself. The shaded sickroom had disappeared, the monotonous wash of the surge had lulled her into a brief dream. She was at Church-Stile House again. There was the plane-tree walk, and the church. The little gate swung lightly on its hinges; a dark, handsome face looked in at the window and smiled at her; and she woke with a start to find raindrops pattering against the window, and the night-lamp paling beside the grey dawn.

'I don't think that I shall get up to-day, so I shall not tire your poor arms,' was Emmie's plaintive remark that

morning.

'Do you feel weaker, my darling? would you rather be

spared the trouble of dressing?'

'Yes; I would rather lie still and be quiet. If you open the folding doors I can see a little bit of the sea, and it does not sound so loud here. I think it is coming, Queen; and oh, I did want to be a little longer with you!'

'What is coming, my pet?' for the child's voice was very sad, and the tears were rolling down her cheeks. 'Oh, don't cry, Emmie! I would rather endure a lifetime of sorrow than see you shed a single tear,' and Queenie trembled all over.

'But it is so hard,' sobbed the child. 'I only wanted this, and then I could have gone so happily; just to say good-bye, and to know that he was taking care of you. I have so prayed for it; and now he will come too late. Hush! what is that, Queen? There are footsteps in the next room, did you hear them?'

'It is only Dr. Bennet, my darling,' returned her sister, marvelling at her exceeding agitation. Whom did she expect? What impossible arrival was she conjuring up in her sick brain? 'Hush! it is only Dr. Bennet, he promised to come early, and we have no other visitor, you know. Lie down again, Emmie, and I will bring him to you.'

The sunshine streamed through the bay-window as she closed the folding doors behind her softly.

'I am so thankful you have come, Dr. Bennet,' she began breathlessly, and then she stopped, and her heart seemed to cease beating for a moment.

'I am not Dr. Bennet, but I trust you are not sorry to see me,' said a familiar voice in her ear, the voice that had vibrated through her waking and sleeping dreams; and there was Garth looking at her, and holding out his hand, with his old kind smile.

'You here? you, of all people in the world!' she gasped, for she was dazed with want of sleep, and the sudden appearance of this dearest friend seemed to her more dreamlike than real; even the pressure of his hand scarcely reassured her. 'I am so stupid, I don't seem to believe it somehow,' she said, wrinkling her brows, and looking at him with such grave, unsmiling eyes that Garth grew almost as grave as she.

'Emmie sent for me; she wrote such a sweet little childish letter that I could not keep away. Why did you not send for me if things were as bad as this?' looking down at her pale face with mingled feelings of pity and love. Worn

and jaded and weary as she looked, with all her brightness quenched, he felt it was the dearest face in the world to him.

'Emmie sent for you, and I never knew it! then it is you she has been expecting these two days. Oh, Mr. Clayton, do you know that she is dying; that I shall soon be without her, the only thing that belongs to me in the whole world?' and moved by the sympathy of his face, Queenie sank down on the couch, and covered her face with her hands.

'Yes, I know all about it, and Langley and I are more sorry for you than I can say. Cathy wanted to come with

me, but she could not leave Langley.'

'But you came. Oh, it is so good of you; and this is such a poor welcome,' trying to smile at him through her tears.

'I could not expect otherwise,' he returned, in an odd, constrained voice, for he was just then restraining with difficulty the longing to take her in his arms and comfort her like a child. Did she understand his feelings? he wondered, for there was a little flush in her face as she moved away, saying that she would tell Emmie.

'May I come with you?' he asked; but he followed her without permission, and so caught the child's first look of

ecstasy.

'Oh, Mr. Garth, Mr. Garth!' was all she said, and then she nestled down contentedly in his strong arms, and laid her head on his shoulder, and the weak hands went up and stroked his face.

'You see I have come, dear Emmie,' he said at last, very gently. 'I have answered your letter in person. You were

sure of me, were you not?'

'Yes, I was sure,' she answered doubtfully. 'But last night I got unhappy, for I feared it would be too late. And now you are going to promise me to take care of Queenie?'

'Emmie, my dear one, hush!' exclaimed poor Queenie,

for her cheeks were flaming at this.

'Let the child speak,' he returned very quietly, but firmly; 'we must not let her have anything on her mind. And she wrote to me, you know. Emmie has always had faith in me,' with an intonation that made Queenie droop her head and be ashamed of her doubts.

'Yes; do let me speak, Queen; I have been so dreadfully unhappy, and I have not much breath for this odd catching in my throat. Mr. Garth, I am not wrong; you do love Queenie, do you not?'

'Yes, dearly,' was the unexpected response, very gravely made.

'Oh, I am so glad!' trying to clap her hands in her old way; but they dropped heavily, and he caught them. 'And you will promise me to take care of her, and try and make her happy all her life!'

'Yes, by God's help, and if she will have it so,' in a low but very distinct tone. And now his hand sought hers, and

kept it.

'Let him go now, my darling,' exclaimed Queenie wildly, and hardly knowing what she was saying, and only conscious of the strong pressure of the hand that held hers. 'All this is making you worse.' And oh, what would he think of them both?

'No; it makes me happy,' returned the child faintly.
'Now I am quite ready to go to sleep as Nan did. You have not kissed her, Mr. Garth. And is there not something else that people always do?' a little restlessly. 'I thought they

wore a ring, or something?'

He half smiled at that, and drew off the heavy seal ring from his little finger. 'Let us humour her,' his eyes seemed to say to Queenie; and weak and confused, she hardly knew how to resist. The ring was on her finger before she knew it, and he had lightly touched her cheek with his lips. 'What does it matter, dear? we understood each other before this,' she heard him say; 'at least you must have understood me.' And then he rose from his seat and placed the child in her arms.

The rest of the day was a dream to Queenie; she never stirred from Emmie's side. Garth came in and out in a quiet, businesslike way, but he never stayed long. Once or twice he brought some refreshment to her, and remained beside her until she had taken it. 'You must eat it, or you will be ill,' he said, very gravely, when she would have refused it. After the first, Emmie seemed hardly conscious of his presence; a fainting fit had followed the excitement of the morning, and

there had been only a partial rally. She lay through the remainder of the day motionless and speechless, with her hand in her sister's, and a faint flicker of her old innocent smile round her lips. Once only she brightened visibly when Garth stooped and kissed her. 'Now I am happy,' Queenie heard her say. 'Dear Mr. Garth, I know he will take care of her!'

It was late in the evening when she roused to full consciousness. The day had been sultry, and the folding doors had been flung open, and now a pleasant breeze swept from the sea and blew refreshingly through the room. Garth was pacing up and down on the balcony. The moon had already risen, and a broken pathway of light seemed to stretch over the dark water. By and by a star trembled on the edge of a long fleecy cloud. Through the open window he could catch a glimpse of the little fair form propped up with pillows, with the patient figure beside it; now and then a low tone reached his ears.

'Are we alone, Queen! Where is Mr. Garth!'

'He is out there, looking at the sea; it is so beautiful to-

night. Shall I call him, dear?'

'No; I like to feel that we are alone together once more, just you and I. We have always been so happy together, have we not, Queen ?'

'Yes, yes, my darling.'

'There will be so many waiting for me there—mamma and papa, and Uncle Andrew, and Nan, and Captain Fawcett's little girl; but sometimes I am afraid that I shall miss you very badly, dear. I hope it is not wicked to feel that.'

'No, of course not, my pet; but God will take care of

that; He will not let you miss me too much.'

'Never to be tired again, how strange that will be!'

continued the dying child.

Queenie softly repeated the words, 'Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'

'Ah, that sounds nice. You always say such comforting things. I know I have tired you dreadfully, Queen, and made you very unhappy, but you will soon be better, will you not?'

'I will try,' in a faint voice, striving to repress her agitation, for a strange, indefinable expression seemed stealing over the child's face.

'When you are sad you must say to yourself, "Emmie likes me to be happy," and then you will feel better, you know; but I can't talk any more, the sea sounds so close. Kiss me and say good-night, Queen.'

A little while afterwards, when Garth stole softly to the door of the sickroom, the sisters were still clinging together; but going still closer, he saw that Queenie was unconsciously rocking a dead face upon her bosom.

He had taken the child from her arms, and then led her gently from the room, and she had not resisted him; she only laid her face down on the arm of the chair where he had placed her, and wept as though the very floodgates of her being were unloosed.

'Yes, cry, dear, it will do you good,' was all he said to her, but for a long time he stood beside her; just smoothing her soft hair with his hand, but tenderly, as though she were a child, until the first bitterness of her anguish was past, and then she said quietly that she must go back to Emmie.

'But not to-night, dear, surely not to-night!' looking down with infinite pity at her poor drowned face and halfextinguished eyes.

.'Yes; to-night. No one must do anything for her but me; it is only putting her to bed for the last time, you know,' in so pitiful a voice that it broke his resolution.

'Ah, well, I must not hinder you, I suppose, but I only wish I knew what was right in such a case. If only Langley or Cathy were here!'

'I will not stay long, I will promise you that.'

'Then I will trust you. Remember you belong to me now, Emmie gave you to me,' and then he took her in his arms and kissed her forehead, and let her go.

But he did not see her again for three whole days. Her work was finished, and the brave, bright spirit had given way at last. The next day she was too ill to rise, and lay looking at the flowers he sent her, and some locks of fair hair that she had cut from Emmie's head. It was not until the

evening of the second day that she crept for an hour to Emmie's room. Garth was out, but on his return they showed him the results of her handiwork.

The child looked fair as a sculptured angel, laid under a perfect quilt of flowers—roses white and creamy, and delicate cape-jessamine. A cross of frail white blossoms lay on her breast; some half-opened rosebuds had been pushed into her dead hand, but on the sweet lips lay Emmie's own smile.

'Never to be tired more!' could one look at that perfect rest, that marble calm, and wish the worn-out child back to suffer again! Queenie could not, though she wept, and wept as though her heart were broken, though at night she stretched out her empty arms in the darkness, and no light form nestled into them. 'It is well with my darling now,' she would sob.

It was in the evening of the third day when Garth saw her again; he had sent her a little note, telling her of some necessary arrangements that he had made, and she had come down to him in her black dress, and with the palest face he had ever seen.

'How ill—how dreadfully ill you look,' he said in a shocked voice, as he sprang to meet her. 'My dear Queenie, this is not right; they ought not to have permitted you to rise.'

'Mrs. Bennet thought the change downstairs might do me good,' she returned, in a weak, hollow voice that scarcely seemed to belong to her; 'and I—I wanted to see you, and thank you for what you have done.'

'And my arrangements have satisfied you?'

'Perfectly and entirely.'

'That is well,' smiling at her; 'then I have not worked in vain. And you'—hesitating a little, 'you will be guided by my advice about the day after to-morrow.'

'Oh no, I cannot,' clasping her hands with a little sob.
'Dr. Bennet says it will not really hurt me, if I have set my heart on going, and I am stronger—much stronger now.'

'But you will faint—something will surely happen to you;

you are unfit to move,' he remonstrated.

'No, I will be very good, if you will only take me,' she implored. 'If you refuse, I shall lose heart altogether, and

then indeed I shall be worse; please give way to me in this;' and he reluctantly consented.

But he need not have feared for her. Queenie went through the painful ordeal with a calmness that surprised him. True she trembled a good deal, and the brown eyes looked cloudy with unshed tears, and once she quitted his arm, and knelt down and kissed the sods that covered her darling; but there was no undue manifestation of grief, and he left her quiet and outwardly calm when he walked back to his hotel.

But the next evening he found her looking worn and ill; she was sitting by the window with a little old Bible of Emmie's in her lap. She laid it aside as she greeted him.

'Do you know that I must be going back to Hepshaw, and that you and I must have some conversation together ?' he said in a meaning voice, as he took the chair beside her. She changed colour at that, and then he saw her nervously pulling off the seal ring from her finger.

'I must not forget that this is your property,' she said, not looking at him, but straight out of the window; and he saw that her face and even her throat were suffused with crimson. 'I know how kindly you meant it, and I ought to have given it back before.'

'It is certainly a shabby old ring, but you might have kept it until I had replaced it by another,' taking possession of the hand and the ring too.

'But—but it all meant nothing,' she stammered. 'It was good of you to quiet my darling, and give in to her fancy, but of course I understood that it all meant nothing.'

'Did it mean nothing when I took you in my arms and kissed you the other night?'

'Oh, Mr. Clayton, how can you?' turning away and covering her face with her hand; he had still possession of the other.

'Did it mean nothing when I told Emmie that I loved you dearly, and would care for you, God helping me, all my life? did you say a dissenting word then?'

'No; I was too stunned, too overwhelmed. I could say or do nothing at all.'

'Do you mean to tell me now that you will have nothing

to do with my love? that it is valueless to you, Queenie? Surely you can care for me a little!' with such a loving glance that she could not meet it.

'It is not that—that I cannot care, I mean; you know

that there are other things in the way.'

'Do you mean your money? I have been thinking over that all these months, and I have come to the conclusion that I have been a sorry coward in the matter. Things somehow look to me quite different. If we love each other—if you can care for me as your words seem to imply—why should this trumpery money part us? I would rather have you without it,' after a pause, during which she had not spoken. 'I would prefer your being our schoolmistress still; but it can't be helped. Besides, I am in a better position myself, and business is flourishing; and, whatever people say, I shall never need to live on my wife's money. You see I am speaking openly to you, dear, and as though things were already settled between us.'

'Yes; but Dora! how about Dora?' and now he felt the

trembling of the hand he held.

He became grave at that, all the more that he read the

unspoken anxiety in her eyes.

'I will tell you all about that if you are sure you can listen.' And as she signified her assent, he told her briefly of his old connection with Dora, and his intentions concerning her; and how she had repulsed him and kept him at bay until he had risen against her tyranny, and had at last freed himself. 'It was not love that I felt for her at all; I found that out in time to save us from a lifetime of misery. I never knew what love was till I came that night in the gloaming and saw you kneeling on the hearth, my darling, with the plate of cakes in your hand.'

'Did you love me then?' very shyly.

'Then and ever afterwards. Do not let Dora be mentioned again between us, she is only my old playmate and friend. She never has been, she never can be, the one woman in the world to me; you only can be that.'

And Queenie believed him. And so Garth replaced the old seal ring on her finger. 'Only until I can find one more worthy of your acceptance,' as he said to her.

'But I never mean to part with this,' she returned tearfully. 'You put it on to please dear Emmie, and it made her happy to see it. Oh, Garth, was it not good of my darling to bring us together?' And Queenie hid her face on his arm and wept with mingled sorrow and joy.

#### CHAPTER XLV

## GARTH'S WIFE

'Sole partner, and sole part of all these joys, Dearer thyself than all.'—MILTON.

It cost Garth a severe struggle to leave his betrothed and go back to his business at Hepshaw; but his presence was imperatively needed at the quarry, and Queenie, with her usual unselfishness and good sense, was the first to perceive the necessity.

'How can I find it in my heart to leave you just now?'
he said the next morning, when he had walked up from his
hotel to spend an hour or two with her. Perhaps her deep
mourning made her seem so thin and pale; but there was
certainly a wasted look about her, as though she had passed
through a long illness.

'But you must leave me,' she replied gently. 'You are wanted at Warstdale; and then Langley needs you. I will not have you neglect your duties for me; you have been here

already ten days, have you not?'

'Yes; but Langley has Cathy, and you are all alone,' he remonstrated. 'Dear Queenie, could you not rouse yourself and come back with me? and we would all nurse you well again.'

She shook her head sadly.

'No, no; Cathy has enough on her hands, you do not want another invalid at Church-Stile House; besides, I am not fit to travel just now, Dr. Bennet said so only yesterday. He told me I must have quiet and rest.'

'You know he and his wife have offered to take care of you. What good Samaritans they are!'

'Yes, indeed, they are everything that is kind; but, Garth,' hesitating shyly over his name, 'you will not ask me to do that. They are very good, dear people, but they are comparative strangers. I could not bear to leave this place; I am only just fit to lie and look at the sea all day, and think of you and Emmie.'

'I know it will be bad for you; but I don't see what else is to be done,' he returned despondingly. 'Warstdale cannot get on without me; but I shall not have a moment's peace until I have you safely in my own keeping. Will you promise to be well in a fortnight, if I come back and fetch you?'

'A fortnight is too short a time; I shall hardly be strong then,' with a sigh of mental and bodily weakness that was sad to hear.

Dear as his presence was to her, and sweet the knowledge of their mutual love, it taxed her overwrought strength sorely to sit and talk to him.

'Three weeks, then ! I cannot be longer without seeing you.'

'I will try to be ready for you then,' she answered, with one of her rare, sweet smiles. Then, as she read the unspoken anxiety in his eyes, 'Indeed, you must not be troubled about me; I will not fret more than I can help, and I have such sweet, happy thoughts about my darling; and then I cannot feel really lonely when I have you. Oh, Garth, if you only knew how different life looks to me now!' and for a little while she clung to him.

But though she sent him away half comforted she knew that she never needed him so sorely as during the miserable days of prostration and nervous depression that followed his departure; and but for very shame she would have recalled him.

For a little time she was utterly broken, and could only lie and weep, and pray that strength might be given her to bear her trouble. For ever through the lonely days and in the darkness of her sleepless nights Emmie's plaintive voice seemed sounding in her ears—'We have been so happy together, have we not, Queen?' The last clasp of the weak arms seemed still round her—she could feel their touch still:

and the heavy drop of the head that Garth had lifted so tenderly from her bosom. Was she dead! She had not known it; even now she never thought of her as dead. During the brief snatches of slumber that came to her she was for ever carrying the light figure to and fro; there were the fair curls, the great, solemn blue eyes, the innocent smile playing round her mouth. 'Am I very heavy! do I tire your arms, Queen! Oh, it is so nice to be together, just you and I!'

But Queenie bravely battled with her sorrow; and she was not without her consolation. Letters came to her from Church-Stile House—sweet, loving ones from Langley and Cathy, and others that she read with a happy smile, and hid

under her pillow.

Garth's letters were very short and kind. They were not specially lover-like, there was no protestation of affection in them; but the whole breathed a spirit of quiet, watchful tenderness—the tenderness that a good man gives to the woman who has entrusted her future to him.

How Queenie loved these letters; they seemed to give fresh life to her.

'You have had good news, I can see,' Dr. Bennet would say to her when he came in, and found her a little less

languid, and with a faint colour in her cheeks.

He was very watchful over the girl, and almost fatherly in his manner to her; he drove her himself to the cemetery when she craved for another sight of the little green mound. There was to be a marble cross at the head, and the little garden ground was to be planted with all the flowers that Emmie loved—her favourite roses, and in the springtime snowdrops and violets and lilies of the valley. Kind-hearted Mrs. Bennet promised to look after it when Queenie should be away in her northern home.

Garth's secret source of uneasiness when he had reached Hepshaw, and had received his sisters' delighted congratulations, was how he should break the news to Dora, and how she would receive it. He had made a clean breast of the whole thing to Queenie, as in duty bound, and then had bade her dismiss the matter from her mind. Dora and he were unsuited for each other; they were just old playmates

and friends, that was all. He had no idea that Dora in her jealous desperation had appealed to Queenie, nor was Queenie ever likely to inform him.

Should he send Cathy over to Crossgill Vicarage to break the news, or should he write a little note to the Vicar? Somehow he shrank from writing to the girl herself, but before he could make up his mind the difficulty was solved for him.

One of those endless little notes, inviting him to a business consultation with Mr. Cunningham, reached him about three days after his arrival, but this time Flo had written it. Dora had hurt her hand, but she sent her kind regards to Mr. Clayton, and would he do them the pleasure, as papa wanted him so badly, and so on? Of course Dora had dictated the clever little letter.

Garth winced and reddened over it, and something like 'Confound these clever women!' sounded through his moustache; but, all the same, he told himself that he must go. 'I have been a fool for my pains, and I suppose I must pay the penalty of being a fool, he thought, with a shrug of his shoulders; but the idea of that drawing-room at Crossgill Vicarage was odious to him.

No one need have envied him when he got into his dogcart and drove along the familiar road. He had resolved to brave it out, and had written a very friendly and facetious answer to Flo. Nevertheless, he was very nervous and confused when he followed old Nurse across the little hall.

By some accident he was unusually late, and they were all in the drawing-room, even Mr. Cunningham, who gently scolded him for his want of punctuality.

'He is not so very late, papa; and cook can easily put back the dinner a quarter of an hour,' observed Dora placidly. She had met Garth in a perfectly friendly manner. 'Mr. Clayton, will you go upstairs at once, please? it does not matter in the least, only papa is so methodical in his ways. Our dinner hour ought to have been enrolled among the laws of the Medes and Persians.'

'As I ought to have known by this time,' returned Garth, with a nervous laugh, and then he took himself off, and found old Nurse unpacking his portmanteau.

Dinner passed over pretty comfortably. He could talk with the girls, and, as he was a favourite with them, they found plenty to say to him. Dora was rather quiet, but she was perfectly good-humoured, though perhaps a trifle dignified; but in her white dress she looked almost as young and girlish as her sisters.

Still it was a relief when he and Mr. Cunningham were left to their business ttte-à-ttte, and he could relax a little from his company manners. When they had disposed of their business the Vicar seemed inclined to settle himself to his usual nap, but Garth began to fidget.

'I won't keep you a moment, and I must go into the drawing-room. But you are such an old friend, Mr. Cunningham, that I thought—'and then he managed to blurt it out.

The Vicar was wide awake enough now.

'Dear, dear,' he observed, in a perplexed and slightly annoyed voice, 'who would have thought of this! Does Dora—do the girls know!'

'Not at present; but I am going in to tell them.'

'Do so, do so by all means,' with a glance towards the door. 'They will be surprised, of course; I am. Who would have dreamed you were such a deep fellow, Garth, and taking us all in like this? And the young woman has money, eh?'

'I am sorry to say Miss Marriott has a large fortune,'

returned Garth stiffly. 'Neither of us wanted it.'

'Of course not; but, all the same, you have managed to do a good thing for yourself. Young and rich and good-looking. Well, my dear fellow, I congratulate you, though I own I never was more surprised in my life.' And Mr. Cunningham sighed as he stretched out his white hands to the fireless grate. Evidently the news had not pleased him.

'I am in for it now,' thought Garth, as he opened the drawing-room door. Of course Dora was alone, he expected that; but he could see the slim figures of the girls passing to and fro between the flower-beds. To his surprise Dora bade him call them in.

'Unless you would like to go out and join them,' she said, just lifting her eyes from her work, but not inviting him by word or gesture to sit down.

'I hope you don't mean to dismiss me like this,' he returned lightly. 'We will go out to the girls by and by, but just now I have something I want to tell you.'

'I thought you never wanted to tell me things now,' she answered plaintively, and her bosom heaved a little, and her

blue eves began to soften and gleam dangerously.

'Oh yes, I do; you must not say such unkind things to me, Dora. I hope I may tell my old playmate of a piece of good fortune that has befallen me. I wonder whether it will be news to you, or whether my visit south will have enlightened you? Do you know I am going to be married?'

'To whom ?' she asked. But she did not flinch, neither

did her voice change in the least.

'To Miss Marriott.'

'Of course I knew it,' she returned, taking up her work and sewing hurriedly. 'You know you told me on your last visit that Miss Marriott had come into a large fortune. I congratulate you, Mr. Clayton; you have done exceedingly well for yourself.'

If she had wished to mortify and exasperate him she had

entirely succeeded.

'Why do you and your father speak as though Miss Marriott's fortune was any inducement?' he returned hotly. 'Surely you know me better than that! It is the money that has been the stumbling-block all these months. I would marry her gladly and proudly if she had not a penny, and were still the schoolmistress of Hepshaw.'

'Ah, you always were Quixotic,' was the repressive answer. Garth was silent. He was inwardly provoked that she chose to misunderstand him; and he had a sore feeling that, after all their friendship, she should not have a kind word for him. But, looking at her, he saw that she had grown strangely pale, and that her hand was trembling; and then his heart grew very soft.

'Don't let us quarrel,' he implored. 'We have always been such good friends, have we not, Dora? You know there is no one except Miss Marriott and my sisters whom I can compare with you, I have always so trusted and respected you. You will wish me God-speed in my new life,

will you not?'

'Yes, Mr. Clayton, I will wish you that,' she returned, very calmly, as she took up her work again. 'Now you must go and call in the girls, as Flo is delicate and the dews are falling.'

But Garth did a strange thing before he went, for, as he stood looking at his old playmate a little sadly and tenderly, he suddenly stooped over her and touched the little hands with his lips. He had had a sort of tenderness for her, and now the tie was broken between them. But whatever she thought of the liberty, Dora never spoke or raised her head,

and for the rest of the evening she was very quiet.

Garth breathed more freely after this; but time hung heavily on his hands until the stipulated three weeks were over, and he could start for St. Leonards. He and his sisters held long consultations together about the future. Queenie was to pay them a long, long visit, and was to recover her strength; and early in the spring he would persuade her, in spite of her deep mourning, to marry him quietly.

'She is all alone, and there is plenty of room for us,' as

both he and Langley agreed.

But he grumbled sadly over her looks when he saw her again: the beautiful eyes had not regained their old brightness, though they looked so lovingly at him.

'I have wanted you! how I have wanted you!' she whispered, as she came, oh, so gladly, into his outstretched arms.

'Not more than I have wanted you, my darling.'

'Oh yes; more, a great deal more; but now you are here all will be well with me. I am very weak still, but I know you will take care of me, and be patient until I get bright again.'

'My dearest, can you doubt it?' he returned, very gravely.

And indeed he was good to her, too good she sometimes

thought.

But it needed all his support and tenderness to make the long journey even bearable to her; and she was sadly exhausted when they drove over the little bridge and under the dark plane-trees, and he lifted her down and placed her in Langley's arms.

She and Cathy almost wept over the girl's altered looks.

'Oh, my dear, my dear, how shall we comfort you?' cried poor Cathy, kneeling down beside her, and trying not to burst into tears.

'We must leave that to time and Garth, and only be as good to her as we can,' returned her sister gently, and then she took the tired face between her hands and kissed it tenderly and laid it on her breast.

But it was not in human nature to resist all the sweet, wholesome sympathy that surrounded her; and Queenie was young and beloved, besides loving with all her heart. As the days and weeks passed away courage and strength returned to her. It was not that Emmie was forgotten,—deep in her inmost soul lay the image of that dearly-loved sister,—but that her glorious young vitality asserted itself.

'How can I remain so dreadfully unhappy when I have you?' she would whisper to Garth when they paced up and down the long plane-tree walk in the sunset; and indeed any

girl might have been proud of such a lover.

They had no reserves, these two. Queenie would tell him all her innocent thoughts—how lonely she had felt when she had seen him and Dora together, and how she had watched, night after night, for the red flicker of his cigar as he walked underneath the plane-trees; and Garth listened to her, and though he said very little in reply Queenie was perfectly content.

For day by day the sweet conviction came to her that she was growing deeper into her lover's heart, that the sympathy between them was ever greater; their delight in each other's presence was quiet but intense; speech seemed unnecessary to them, they understood each other without a word.

When two months had passed, and Queenie announced her intention of going to Carlisle and taking up her abode for the present with Caleb Runciman, he let her go almost without a word, though the sunshine seemed to die out of the old house with her presence; and when Langley would have remonstrated he silenced her at once.

'She thinks it will be best, and perhaps she is right. Of course we shall have a dull winter, but it will be worse for her, shut up with that old man; but in the spring she has promised things shall be as I wish.' And a flush crossed

Garth's handsome face as he spoke, for the thought of bringing home his wife was very sweet and sacred to the

young man.

So Queenie spent the long winter months in the narrow little house in the High Street, with only Caleb and Molly. But it was not such a dull life after all. Friends came over from Hepshaw to see her-Faith Stewart, and Miss Cosie, and now and then Langley and Cathy, and every week Queenie and he would take long walks brought Garth. together. How she loved to show him her old haunts-Granite Lodge, and the Close, and her favourite nook in the Cathedral! Now and then they would walk over to the castle where poor Mary Queen of Scots had been incarcerated. and gaze up at the little window out of which Fergus Vich Ian Vohr used to look. The sentries would look after them as they strolled across the place—the tall, good-looking fellow, with the slight girl wrapped in furs beside him.

'What a colour you have, my Queen! and how bright your eyes are!' he would say, for, half in jest and half in loving reality, he often called her 'my Queen,' and she would look up and smile, well pleased that he should praise her.

And so one day in the early spring, when the violets and crocuses were growing on Emmie's grave, there was a quiet wedding at Carlisle, and Queenie became Garth Clayton's wife.

It was a very quiet wedding, only Langley and Cathy and Ted were there, and Mr. Logan came over to marry them. She had worn bridal-white, but after the ceremony she had resumed her mourning.

'Garth did not mind,' she said, 'and she was unwilling to

put it off unless he wished it.'

Garth was too perfectly happy to find fault with anything. A holiday was a rare thing with him, and he and Queenie had planned it to the best advantage, in a tour through Normandy. Queenie had never been abroad, and Garth had only once left England. The change of scene would be good for both of them.

When May was over they came back to Hepshaw, and settled down quietly, 'as sober married people,' Garth would say, with a proud look at his young wife.

It was a happy household at Church-Stile House. Queenie's good sense and sweetness of temper averted even the ordinary jars that are liable to occur in the most united family. In her husband's eyes she was simply faultless.

'Where is my wife?' was always his first question if she were not in the porch to meet him. 'My wife'—he seemed

never weary of saying it.

'How can you spoil any man so, Mrs. Clayton,' Dora said to her once, on one of her rare visits to Church-Stile House.

Garth had taken his wife more than once to Crossgill Vicarage, but Dora's ponies seldom drove now through the Hepshaw lanes. 'Beatrix was going to be married, and she was so busy.' There was always some excuse; but she was quite pleasant and friendly to Queenie when they met, though there was no special sympathy between them. But Queenie could never rid herself of a secret feeling of embarrassment in Dora's presence. That conversation lay as a barrier between them; she even felt a little self-reproach when Garth once hinted that Dora looked older and more worn than she used to look. Was it possible that she had really cared for him so much after all?

If she had she kept her secret well and fulfilled all her duties admirably. She married both her sisters, becoming the most inveterate matchmaker for their sakes; and she soothed her father's declining years with the utmost dutifulness.

When he was dead, and she was no longer young, she took a step that surprised her friends considerably, for she married a wealthy widower with three middle-aged daughters, who had come to live lately at a grand old place called Dingle Hall.

'They are only nouveaux richesses, my dear,' as an illnatured widow remarked, 'and he has made all his money in trade; but Dora Cunningham cannot live without managing

somebody.'

If she managed him she did it admirably, for he and her stepdaughters almost worshipped her. She was a young-looking woman still, and knew how to make the best of herself; and Dingle Hall was soon famed for its hospitality and the good taste of its mistress.

But long before that time there had been many and great changes at Church-Stile House. First the new house had been built on the little piece of sloping meadow-land looking over Hepshaw—Warstdale Manor, as it was called, and the master of Warstdale had taken up his abode there, but not until Langley had left them to become Harry Chester's wife.

And by and by there was another wedding.

'What do you think Cathy has told me?' exclaimed Garth one day, when he found his wife sitting alone in their favourite room—a handsome library, with a side window commanding a view of Church-Stile House and the church. 'I really think the girl must be clean daft to dream of such a thing, but she declares that with or without my consent she means to marry Logan.'

'Well?' and Queenie laid down her work and smiled

placidly in his face.

'Well, how can you sit there in that provokingly unconcerned way, you very tiresome woman, and looking exactly as though it were no news to you at all? our Cathy too!'

'Because I have expected it all along,' returned his wife calmly. 'I knew, however much she might resist it, that in

the end she would be true to herself and him.'

'Why, if this is not enough to try a man's patience,' exclaimed Garth, quite irritably for him. 'You talk as though you approve of this monstrous match.'

'So I do. Mr. Logan is a good man; and then he loves

Cathy so dearly.'

'But he is double her age; he is forty-five if he is a day, and Cathy not more than three-and-twenty. Why, they will look like a father and daughter! The very idea is absurd!'

'The discrepancy between their ages is a pity, of course,' returned Queenie, with an admiring look at her own 'gudeman.' Garth was handsomer than ever, every one said so. 'But I know one thing, that Cathy will never fancy any one else.' And, as usual, Garth soon discovered that his wife's surmises were correct.

'So you are going to stand on tiptoe all your life, trying to get a peep at your husband's excellences?' Queenie said to her, with a lively recollection of a conversation between them. 'Oh, you foolish Cathy!'

'No; I am the wise Catherine now,' returned her friend. 'You see we poor women can't escape our fate after all. I am tired of running away from myself and him, and pretending not to care for his liking me; so I just told him that he must put up with me, faults and all, for I won't promise to mend; but if I am not the better for being with him—' and then she stopped suddenly, and her eyes were full of tears. 'Oh, Queenie, don't laugh at me, and don't let Garth say a word against it; for, though he were as old as my father, I love and honour and venerate him, and I mean to take care of him, and make him happy all his life long.'

And Cathy kept her word. Garth grumbled a good deal, and would not be reconciled, and turned sulky when he met them strolling up the lane together; but even he was driven at last to confess that it had made a woman of Cathy, and that it had not turned out arrive after all

that it had not turned out amiss after all.

Mr. Logan was no longer poor when they married, and it was by Garth's advice that they left Miss Cosie to take care of the Vicarage, and came to live at Church-Stile House, where Ted was holding solitary state.

But before that migration was accomplished, there was a new arrival at Warstdale Manor. Queenie's boy was now two years old, and this time it was a small, fair girl that they placed in Garth's arms.

'Our little daughter,' he whispered tenderly. 'What shall

we call her, my wife?'

But though no word crossed Queenie's lip the look in the brown eyes were all-sufficient, and he hastened to answer—

'It shall be as you wish, Queenie dearest. Of course I knew what you would say; we will call our little darling Emmie.'

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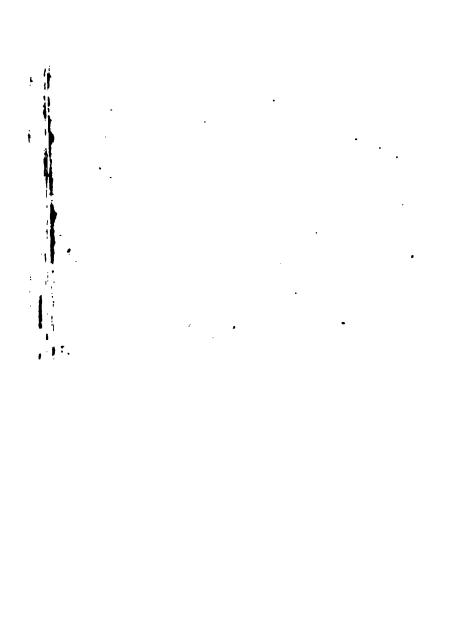


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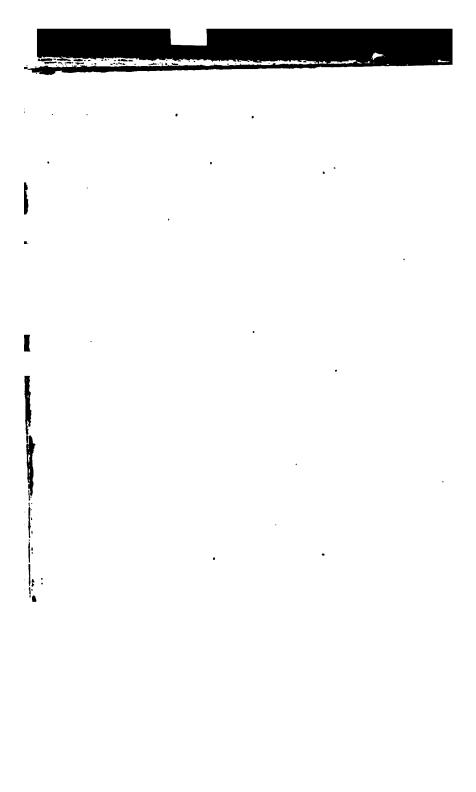
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